Psalms

Pathways of Discipleship Bible Survey

ELM GROVE BAPTIST CHURCH

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Psalms
Pathways of Discipleship Bible Survey

Title and Meaning
- Hebrew Bible: “Praises”

Authors & Date
- Authorship of the psalms
  - David (73 psalms are attributed to him)
  - Asaph (12 psalms)
  - Sons of Korah (11 psalms)
  - Jeduthun (4 psalms)
  - Solomon (2 psalms)
  - Etan (1 psalm)
  - Heman (1 psalm)
  - Moses (1 psalm)
- Final compilation happened after the exile
  - Psalm 137 (Lamenting the exile)
  - Psalm 126 (return from exile)
- Don’t know the exact time they were collected and put into the form we have today

Titles and Subscriptions
- Author titles (“Of David”)
  - Nothing about them should make us question whether or not they are accurately attributed
  - Are the titles authentic?
    - Some argue that titles are inspired
    - Critical view is that they are attributed to people that were legendary
    - Conclusion is that they are ancient traditions concerning the psalms, but were not part of the original texts
- Historical titles (see Psalms 3, 7, 18, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, 142)
  - All but 34 have a title or superscription
  - Phrase “Of David” can have a variety of meanings
    - Maybe he was author
    - Maybe written in honor of David, for him, commissioned by him
    - As a model of David
    - Generally used as an indicator that David was the author
  - Psalm titles reflect early traditions concerning the psalms
    - Appear to be clear evidence that they are secondary additions
Comparing titles with actual text of some psalms let us know they are secondary
Titles sometimes given in third person when psalm was actually written in first person
Titles sometimes don’t fit well with contents of the psalm (Psalm 30)
Sometimes psalms are adapted over time for use in worship
  • Psalm 51; statement at the end that seems to have nothing to do with David and his sin against Bathsheba; perhaps has to do with how the song was incorporated into worship at the temple

Titles denoting literary or musical genres
Titles with musical terms or style
Psalm titles: events in David’s life; David is the model worshiper
  • Psalm 3: when he fled from his son Absalom
  • Psalm 51: when David sinned with Bathsheba
  • Psalm 56: when the Philistines had seized him in Gath
  • Psalm 57: when he was hiding out from Saul
  • Psalm 142: when he was in a cave
  • David worshiped God no matter what

**Structure of Book**

The psalms are arranged into five books that each have a closing doxology or ascription of praise
  • Book 1: Psalms 1-41
  • Book 2: Psalms 42-72
  • Book 3: Psalms 73-89
  • Book 4: Psalms 90-106
  • Book 5: Psalms 107-150

Seems to be some sort of purpose and intent in the way they are arranged
  • A message behind not just the psalms, but in the arrangement
  • Collection of five books also found in the law
  • Editor is asking us to compare and think of Psalms in terms of the five books of Moses
  • Point may be that a person of worship is also a person of the law
  • A person who is a model worshiper is one who loves the law of God
  • Most of early psalms are laments, but end are hymns/praises
    • Emphasis on the fact that God ultimately leads His people to victory; He wins and we share in it
    • Seems to be a statement made about the importance about the Davidic king and how the rule of this king is ultimately connected to the rule of God
      • Royal psalms at key places in the Psalter
        • 2; 72; 89
  • Psalms are ordered and arranged in a way to say that ultimately the rule of God will be recognized in all the earth
    • Psalm 2: nations in opposition to the rule of God and Messiah
• Nations come to recognize the kingship of God (145)
• Hallelujah Psalms (146-150)

• Evidences of earlier collections
  • Smaller collections put together over time
    • Psalm 3-41: Psalms of David (except 3 and 10)
    • Psalm 42-49: Psalms of the Sons of Korah
    • Psalm 73-83: Psalms of Asaph
    • Psalm 93-99: Yahweh malak psalms
    • Psalm 120-134: Psalms of Ascent
    • Psalm 145-150: Hallelujah Psalms

Types of Psalms/Important Features

• Hymns
  • Description
    • Psalms of praise to the Lord that focus on God’s eternal attributes and his great acts in creation and history
    • Focuses on God primarily because of who He is; purest form of worship; worship is the response and recognition of who God is and what he’s about
  • Elements
    • Call to praise; “Praise the Lord”
    • Cause for Praise (reasons why God is worthy of praise)
    • Conclusion (what our response should be)
  • Examples
    • Psalm 29
      • Worshiping God for his power reflected in the forces of nature
      • Power of God reflected in a thunderstorm
      • As I look into the sky and see the storm, I see the power of the Lord and stand in awe of who He is
      • Many think this is a hymn also against Baal
      • God is king and we enjoy great blessing and security because of that
    • Psalm 105
      • Historical focus
      • He remembers his covenant
      • Exodus
      • Provided for needs in wilderness

• Lament Psalms
  • Description
    • Prayers offered to God in times of distress pleading for God’s help, intervention, and deliverance
    • Prophets include stuff like this at times, Jeremiah’s Confessions, Habakkuk,
More laments than any other psalm type (at least 40 laments); major part of how a true worshiper responds to God (there are both personal and community laments)

Elements
- Address/introductory cry
- Lament (description)
  - Not for God’s benefit, but for the benefit of the worshiper
- Confession of trust
  - My faith is still firm despite the circumstances
- Petition prayer
  - Asking God to do something, help, intervene
- Vow of Praise; Turn from lament to praise
  - I’m committed to being a person of praise and worship no matter what
  - Psalm 66:13-15
  - Those who are cynical might say that is sounds like the psalmist is trying to negotiate with God
  - This is really a statement of confidence; I’m committed to the belief that God will get me out of this, even in the midst of the trouble
  - No matter how bad things get, God can still be trusted; no matter how bad it gets, there’s no excuse for not giving credit to God as being trustworthy

Special features
- They often give God motivation for answering their prayer
  - Psalm 6; Lord, I can’t praise you if I’m dead
  - Psalm 7; Judge me according to my integrity
  - Psalm 51; restore me so I can teach others
  - Psalm 69; answer me out of the goodness of your love
- It’s a personal interaction with God; believe there’s a real person out there hearing what I’m saying
- Speak to God as if He’s rational; in a sanctified way, I have a right to argue with God, on the basis of Scripture and the way God has revealed Himself
- Does this work in the New Testament? We don’t have that many example prayers in the NT; if this is an invalid way for Christians to pray, what about the words of Jesus on the cross? Why have you forsaken me?

Examples
- Psalm 6: prayer of a sick person
- Psalm 7: prayer of a person falsely accused
- Psalm 22: prayer of a person under enemy attack
  - Famous because this is the way Jesus prays on the cross
  - Not just talking about what Jesus will be going through; the psalmist actually describing what he’s going through
- Psalm 44: prayer of community after military defeat
  - Not an example of God punishing them for disobedience
  - Wondering why they were defeated even though they weren’t in sin
• **Thanksgiving Psalms**
  • **Description**
    • Psalms that express thanks to God for a specific answer to prayer or for deliverance from danger
    • Different from praise psalms that focus on God’s attributes and what He’s done in the past
    • These focus on a specific thing done for an individual or the group
  • **Elements**
    • Proclamation to praise
      • I will praise
    • Reports of deliverance
      • Details of what happened
    • Praise and instruction for other worshippers
  • **Relationship to the lament and the “vow of praise”**
    • Lament is prayed before; Thanksgiving is prayed after
    • Thanksgiving psalm shows the fulfillment of the vow of praise in the lament; this is my vow of praise
    • Thanksgiving is a reflex action of true worshippers
    • It’s not just a vertical activity, but also horizontal; we hear the thanksgivings of each other and it increases our faith
  • **Examples**
    • Psalm 124; victory in battle

• **Psalms of Confidence**
  • **Description**
    • Expressions of confidence in the Lord and praise to the Lord for the security he provides to those who trust in Him
    • I am totally secure and safe and protected because of the security God gives me
    • Instead of it being one part of the prayer, it’s the whole thing
    • May struggle with these because they don’t seem to be genuine; can I really get to that place in my life?
    • Almost seems to suggest that if you trust in God nothing bad will ever happen
  • **Example**
    • Psalm 23
      • He’s my shepherd; he leads me, provides for me, protects me
    • Psalm 91
      • Whatever you do, God will take care of you
      • What happens when God’s people do fall?
      • Understand that the psalmist is not focusing on the exceptions, but on the emotion of absolute security because of his trust in God
      • Even when I am in trouble, even that trouble is something God is in control of
      • Since I am under God’s protection, your life is bulletproof until the time God is ready for you to be with Him
    • Psalm 37
• We’re secure in the protection and provision of God
  
  Psalm 56:3-4
  
  What can mortal man do to me?
  
  How can you have that kind of confidence in God?
  
  Understand what he’s really going through
  
  1 Samuel 21: he got out of it; was afraid and pretended to be insane
• The psalms of confidence and the life of faith
  
  The problem of the absolute guarantees in the psalms of confidence
  
  The reality of the struggle to trust in times of trouble
  
  These don’t mean that there weren’t times of struggle
• The Royal Psalms
  
  Description
  
  Psalms which celebrate the Davidic king and his special relationship with the Lord
  
  Prayers for the Davidic ruler at special times in his rule
  
  NT tells us that we are to pray for kings and those in authority, but it’s more than that here; focused on the fact that the Davidic king is more than a human ruler; in some sense the rule of God is being mediated through the Davidic king
  
  Davidic covenant
  
  Unconditional promise: David’s throne established for all time
  
  Conditional element: God will bless or punish each Davidic king based on obedience to the Law of God
  
  Examples
  
  Psalm 2: prayer for the king on the day of his coronation
  
  As NT Christians we see it talking about Jesus; ultimately yes, but ancient Israel would know it first about the king at the time
  
  Not just prophetic, messianic psalms; they have a reference to the king in that day, at that time
  
  Psalm 20: prayer for the king as he goes out into battle
  
  Psalm 21: thanksgiving that the Lord has given the king victory over his enemies
  
  Psalm 45: prayer for the king on his wedding day
  
  Your throne will last forever; not deifying the king, but are saying that he is God’s representative (elohim)
  
  Significance and theological issues related to the royal psalms
  
  These psalms focus on God’s special relationship with the house of David
  
  2 Samuel 7; Psalm 2:7; Psalm 89:20–29
  
  The royal psalms ultimately point us to the person of Jesus. Christ as the fulfillment of all of God’s promises regarding the house of David in the Old Testament. The royal psalms were prayers for the historical Davidic kings who lived and ruled in Jerusalem in the days of the Old Testament. However, none of these kings lived up to the ultimate ideal and expectation of what a Davidic ruler was supposed to be. Jesus Christ as the Messiah fulfills the ideal in a way that these kings never could. Every Davidic
king has some flaw that kept their reign from being what God predicted. They are not directly prophetic, but they ultimately point us to Christ because he fulfills the ideal

- Psalm 2:8
  - You will rule over all the world
  - Fulfilled in Revelation 19:14-15
- Psalm 16:8–11
  - You will not abandon me, your holy one to see decay
  - As I’m facing my enemy, you won’t allow me to die
  - Acts 2:25-28; Peter refers to the resurrection; Jesus fulfills it in a greater way
- Psalm 72:17
  - King will rule as long as the sun endures; Jesus fulfills it in a way no human ruler ever could
- Psalm 110
  - The Lord says to My Lord (the future ruler)

- Other ways that the psalms point to Christ
- The righteous sufferer
  - Psalm 22:1, 7-8, 15-18
    - Words of Jesus on the cross
    - The psalmist goes through it and Jesus shares the experience
  - Psalm 41:9
    - Even my close friend betrays me
    - Jesus shares in it with Judas
  - Psalm 69:9, 21
    - Zeal for your house consumes me
    - Jesus quotes it when he sees the corrupt worship at the temple
- If you live a godly life, it will bring you into conflict; Jesus shares in that experience; if David, an imperfect man experienced suffering, Jesus amplified it

**Kingship Psalms** (also called the Enthronement Psalms or the *Yahweh malak* psalms)

- God is worthy of worship because He is the great king
- Worship is my personal response to who God is
- Only when I know fully who He is can I give Him proper worship
- Description
  - Psalms celebrating the rule of God over his creation
- Examples
  - Psalm 47; Psalm 93-99
- Message and significance
  - Ultimately what matters is that God reigns
  - Even the positioning of these psalms suggest that this is central to what the psalms are about
  - My worship is an affirmation of the fact that God is king
  - God is king because He is the creator (95:3-5; 96:4-10)
  - God is king because he has defeated his enemies in history (47:1-3; cf. 24:7-10)
• **Zion Psalms**
  - **Description**
    - Psalms that celebrate Zion because it’s the place where God’s rule is centered; it’s where God’s temple is
  - **Key theme: Zion Theology**
    - Zion is the “highest mountain” (Ps. 48:2)
    - Zion is the source of the rivers of paradise (Ps. 46:4)
    - Zion is the dwelling place of God (Ps. 132: 13-14)
    - The Lord defeats the enemy armies who attack Zion (46, 48, 76)
    - The Lord blesses Zion with prosperity and security (Ps. 132: 15-16)
    - Not literal descriptions of Jerusalem; they are poetic; writers draw on Ancient Near Eastern poetry; gods rule from mountains; life-giving waters at the place where the gods reign; writer arguing against these pagan religions; imagery used against them; God trumps them all
    - When the prophets talked about God’s judgment against Israel, they warned about attacks against Zion
    - The promises of the Zion Psalms are stipulated by the ideal that Zion must be a place of righteousness; the Israelites abused the message of these Psalms, using them as a get out of jail free card

• **Wisdom Psalms**
  - **Description**
    - Psalms which teach the value of living a godly life
    - Same type of theology as in Proverbs
  - **Key themes**
    - Importance of God’s law (Ps. 1, 119)
    - Blessing of the righteous
    - Judgment of the wicked
    - Fate of the righteous and the wicked
      - Psalm 1; Psalm 11:6-7; Psalm 73:18-20; Psalm 92:7-9
      - Christians think in terms of eternity; in the Psalms it’s talking about a reward that takes place in this life
      - Not a clearly defined concept of life after death
      - Psalm 6:5; 30:9; 39:13; 89:48;
      - The wicked are cut off and go down to the grave before their time
        - Psalm 37:35-36; Psalm 49:13-14; Psalm 55:15, 23

• **Imprécatory Psalms**
  - **Description**
    - Prayers which call for God to bring down a curse upon his enemies
  - **Examples**
    - Psalm 58:6-8
    - Psalm 137:8-9
  - **Theological problem – Is such harsh language appropriate for God’s people? How can God approve such language? Are these prayers appropriate for New Testament believers today?**
From OT perspective, how can a godly person pray this kind of prayer?
- Psalmist not just talking about his enemies, not just about personal vengeance
- Enemies are enemies of the nation as a whole, all of God’s people, thus are God’s enemies
- National existence of Israel is at stake
- Simply asking God to do what he has already promised to go; impatient, angry cries of people of faith saying “we took you at your word, do what you promised”

From NT perspective
- NT: there is no nation that is God’s chosen people
  - Matthew 5:44
    - Elevated ethic of love in NT
    - Love your enemies, and by doing that, you will reflect God
    - OT never said hate your enemies, but there is an elevated emphasis on love
    - In a sense, praying the prayers of these psalms are not a model prayer
- We are still looking for God’s ultimate vindication
  - There will be a day when God destroys the wicked
  - Revelation 6:9-11; we will glorify God when we see it

How the Psalms Help Us Today
- The Psalms serve as a guide to worship
  - They are designed to be spoken, so when a psalm touches a topic or theme we wish to express to the Lord, it can help us express our concerns in spite of our own lack of skill to find the right words
- The Psalms demonstrate to us how we can relate honestly to God
  - Honest expression of variety of emotions—joy, anger, disappointment, etc.
  - Psalms shows us how to express these to God
- The Psalms demonstrate the importance of reflection and meditation on things that God has done for us.
  - Psalms is an invitation to prayer, to controlled and meditative thinking on God’s Word
  - Help us capture the greatness of God and give us a sense of what living with Him for all eternity will be like

A Plan for This Week
- Read up to 15-20 Psalms from each “Book”
- Determine the “type” of each Psalm
- Use the Psalms according to three tips listed above

Resources
- Zondervan Handbook to the Bible
- Lasor, Hubbard, and Bush: Old Testament Survey
- Longman and Dillard: An Introduction to the Old Testament
- Lecture Notes from Liberty Theological Seminary, Dr. Gary Yates
- Holman Illustrated Study Bible