

**The Bible of Jesus: An Overview of the Old Testament**  
**Class 8: Praise to the King (The Psalms)**

*When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives*

Mark 12:46

**Summary: The Book of Psalms is the prayer and praise book of God's Son and God's people**

**Open with prayer.**

Today we're studying the Psalms, often described as the prayer book or the hymnal of the Bible. Christians through the ages have testified to the power and the solace of the psalms to speak to God in times of great sadness and times of great joy. The question for us today is, how do they speak for us as Christians.

The book of Psalms is one way God has given us to talk to him in a way that honors him while never minimizing the trials we know. Calvin called this book

“‘An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul’; for there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. Or rather, the Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated.” (Comm. p. xxxvii)

He has given us his own words to use as our words. In good times, nothing better expresses praise to God than the words of the Psalms. In bad times, nothing can better remind us that God knows our sorrows and our troubles. Jesus, while on the cross, turned to at least two psalms - Psalm 22 and Psalm 31.

Today we want to study the psalms by posing five questions:

1. What are the Psalms?
2. Who wrote the Psalms, and when?
3. How are the Psalms structured?
4. What are the different kinds of Psalms?
- and
5. How do the Psalms point to Jesus?
6. How do we read the Psalms as Christians?

**I. WHAT ARE THE PSALMS?**

The Book of Psalms is a collection of 150 musical poems and prayers with different authors and characterized by different literary forms

- All were written in Hebrew
- Some unfamiliar words that appear in the psalms - such as *Selah* - are probably notes for musical or worship direction.
- Many of them have inscriptions which we can treat as reliable.<sup>1</sup>
- The traditional Hebrew title for the book comes from a word that means “songs of praise” – *tehillim*. The title “Psalms” comes from the LXX, taken from the word *psallo* “to pluck,” a word used in context of stringed instruments.
- Many of the psalms were composed for and sung on special occasions. For example, at least five psalms (2, 21, 72, 101, and 110) were created for the coronation of the king.
- Some of the Psalms appear to have been connected with historical events. Fourteen psalms are linked to historical episodes in the life of David (Psalms 3, 7, 18, 30, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, and 142)

The Psalms are entirely poetry, which means that the language is condensed and conveys it's meaning through image and structure.

- English poetry, as you know, tends to work through sound, rhythm and rhyme.

Example:

Mary had a little lamb  
Her fleece was white as snow,  
And everywhere that Mary went,  
Her lamb was sure to go

- However, Hebrew poetry uses “parallelism” to either reinforce, contrast or develop and expand an idea.

Example of reinforcement: Psalm 103:10:

*he does not treat us as our sins deserve  
or repay us according to our iniquities*

Example of contrast: Psalm 63:8

*My soul clings to you;  
your right hand upholds me*

At first, this verse expresses our desire to hold onto God. But then it turns the idea around and reminds us of the opposite - that he is holding us.

God has arranged the verses of the Psalms very deliberately, and used rhetorical devices that makes them accessible to all kinds of people, in all kinds of languages.

"...the poetry of the Psalms has a broad simplicity of rhythm and imagery which survives transplanting into almost any soil. Above all, the fact that its parallelisms

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<sup>1</sup> We should recognize that those introductory titles are part of our Bible as it has come down to us and are not just surplus. However, they are not necessarily inspired. The LXX was translated c. 200 BC. Not all are present yet. However, Jesus himself seems to give these superscriptions great weight, basing one of his arguments with the Pharisees on them. Cf. Matt. 22:41-46 & Psalm 110.

are those of sense rather than of sound allows it to reproduce its chief effects with very little loss of either force or beauty. It is well fitted by God's providence to invite 'all the earth' to 'sing the glory of his name'" (Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 4)

## II. WHO WROTE THE PSALMS, AND WHEN?

The psalms were written by many different people over a long period.

- Moses wrote Psalm 90 in the 14th century B.C.,
- Ezra, may have written Psalm 119 and a few other psalms after the exile—about 1000 years after Moses.
- In addition to Moses and (maybe) Ezra, authors include:  
The Sons of Korah (temple worship leaders who wrote Psalms 42-49, 84-85, and 87-88)  
Asaph (AY - saff) (another worship leader who wrote 12 psalms, including Psalm 50 and Psalms 73-83)  
Solomon, David's son, who wrote Psalm 72  
David: Seventy three Psalms have been written by David, according to the superscriptions. "The Psalter opens with a flurry of Davidic psalms and closes with a similar grouping (3-9; 11-32; 34-41; 138-145)" (Dempster, 194).

We don't know, but perhaps Ezra compiled and organized them in their present form for use in the rebuilt Temple.

## III. HOW ARE THE PSALMS STRUCTURED?

The psalms are divided into five books

- Each book concludes with a doxology - a special song of praise to God.
- Book 5 ends with five doxologies (145-150), which aren't properly part of that book, but rather serve as a climax to the whole, with Psalm 150 serving as the conclusion to the whole Psalter.

**Book 1 includes Psalms 1-41.** This section probably was assembled during David's lifetime or shortly after.

The first two psalms are particularly worth noting for our purposes. **Psalm 1** presents us with two types of people: a righteous man, and a wicked man.

- Look at this righteous man in verses 1 to 3. "Blessed is the man" who does not walk, stand, or sit with the wicked. "But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season." The tree imagery reminds us, perhaps, of the Garden, or maybe the eschatological temple in Ezekiel 47.

So who is this model of righteous living, who delights in God's law, meditating on it day and

night? Was it any of the Israelites? Can you walk into church, hear that read, and say, “Hey, I’ve done that!” Who is this righteous man?

Now look at Psalm 2. Is Psalm 2, which follows on the heels of Psalm 1, accidentally placed?

- Verse 2, the kings of the take their stand against the LORD and his Anointed One (*Messiah*).
- Verse 5: he rebukes them.
- Verse 6: He’s installed his King.
- Verses 7-9: I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.’”

So we have the promise of this grand messianic figure, who will be King, and Messiah and Son and who will rule over the earth. At the beginning of the Psalter, then, there is an eschatological (end-time) expectation of the Messiah’s rule over the whole earth.

*And then immediately after this, we have 30 Psalms by David, calling attention to him!* Stephen Dempster therefore writes, “It is clearly David who is emerging as the focus of the Bible. Somehow the hopes of the Israelite nation are placed on his shoulders” (p. 195).

***Book 2 includes Psalms 42-72***

- These psalms often address distress and difficulty experienced by individual people
- Speaking generally, these are psalms of great comfort

***Book 3 includes Psalms 73-89***

- Many of these psalms were probably written after the exile to Babylon, and may have been written as a source of comfort and solace in this time of national catastrophe
- These psalms help us understand the apparent triumph of evil men, and how fleeting it is in light of God’s greater purposes

***Book 4 includes Psalms 90-106***

- This book shows the importance of worship in the wake of the exile.
- In general, this section stresses divine kingship and contrasts it with human kingdoms.
- Psalm 110 is a good example of this.

***The last book, Book 5, also stresses divine kingship***

- This section - which includes Psalms 107 through Psalm 150 - is the longest section in the Psalms
- Its main theme is praise to God.

As already mentioned, this praise builds to a climax in the last five psalms, where we see continuous praise and honor given to God. We might compare these last five psalms to the final portion of a fireworks show, when the finale features the biggest and brightest bursts. The theme of this section is summed up well by Psalm 150:6: *Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.*

## IV. WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF PSALMS?

There are many different views on this, but generally speaking, we can sort the psalms into ten different kinds:

1. Psalms of lament
2. Psalms of thanksgiving
3. Psalms of praise (these are hymns)
4. Enthronement psalms
5. Royal psalms
6. Psalms of Zion
7. Psalms of wisdom: *like we looked at in Psalm 1.*
8. Psalms of Trust
9. Liturgies
10. Torah Psalms – Psalm 119

This morning, let me give you an example of just three, which make up the vast majority of the psalms.

### ***1. First, let's look at psalms of lament:*** look at psalm 3.

- First, the psalmist addresses God. v. 1a: “O Lord.”
- Next, the psalmist lays out his *complaint* to God. vv. 1b–2: “How many are my foes!...God will not deliver him.”
- But a psalm of lament is not a pity party. The psalmist then turns and confesses his *trust* in God. vv. 3–6: “But you are a shield around me...I will not fear...”
- But not only does he trust in God, he cries out for God to *deliver* him from his troubles. v. 7: “Arise, O Lord! Deliver me, O my God!...”
- This is usually followed by an *assurance* of God’s merciful and faithful character. v. 8a: “From the Lord comes deliverance”
- And finally, a *concluding prayer*, generally of praise, but sometimes a repetition of the need for deliverance. v. 8b: “May your blessing be on your people.”

The psalms of lament do not pretend that everything goes well for those who trust in God. Rather, they encourage us to take our cares to God, and trust him to deliver us.

### ***2. Psalms of thanksgiving*** [Flip over to Psalm 30]

- Psalms of thanksgiving are expressions of gratitude to God for what he has accomplished.
- Like psalms of lament, these typically follow a standard form.
- Verse 1: he *invokes* God—“I will exalt you, O Lord.”
- Verses 2-3: the psalmist lays out his *motive* for giving thanks.
- Verses 4-10: the psalmist *addresses* God, often remembering his original plea. Verse 8: “To you, O Lord, I called.”
- Verses 11-12a: he recounts God’s *response*: “You turned my wailing into dancing.”
- Verse 12b: Finally, the psalmist ends by giving God thanks: “I will give you thanks

forever.”

### ***3. Psalms of praise***

- Psalms of praise are similar to the thanksgiving psalms, but are distinguished by their lack of reference to the worshiper’s earlier problems or God’s recent intervention. Psalms of praise are centered on the praise of God for his own sake. They too have a structure, which we can remember as SRR. Flip to Psalm 148 as an example.
- First, there is the Summons to praise. vv. 1–4, 7–12.
- Next, there are the Reasons for praise. vv. 5–6, 13–14a.
- Finally, there is a Recapitulation of praise. Sometimes this is very brief. v. 14b.

## **V. HOW DO THE PSALMS POINT US TO JESUS?**

Finally, how do the psalms point us to Jesus? And once we see how the Psalms relate to Jesus, we can hopefully answer another question: how we are to read the Psalms as Christians? That’s not as simple as one might think. For instance, Psalm 18 reads, “The LORD has dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me. For I have kept the ways of the LORD; I have not done evil by turning from my God” (vv. 20-21). Can you read and pray this in your quiet time?

Graeme Goldsworthy puts our dilemma well: “Does the Christian simply identify with the psalmist (in praise of God or in cry for help)? If we identify with the psalmist, to what extent and on what grounds? To ask the latter question is to inquire of the biblical-theological link between the psalm and the Christian believer” (*Preaching the Whole Bible*, p. 200).

Well, we can only find answers to these questions by looking at the best commentary available on the Old Testament, the New Testament. What did Jesus and the New Testament authors say about the Psalms? Quite simply, they all said the Psalms were fulfilled in Jesus. Remember Jesus’ words in Luke 24:44? “He said to them, ‘This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.’” How did he “fulfill” what was written about him in the Psalms?

In his book *The Ancient Love Song: Finding Christ in the Old Testament*, Redeemer Presbyterian pastor Charles Drew titles his chapter on the Psalms “Songs of the Messiah.” And he divides the songs of the Messiah into two types: songs *about* the Messiah and songs *by* the Messiah. And I think this division helps us know how Jesus “fulfills” the Psalms, as well as how to read them as Christians. (What follows draws heavily from Drew.)

### ***Psalms about the Messiah***

The Psalms about the Messiah are not too hard to recognize. Psalm after psalm focuses our attention this great and glorious king of Israel, so great and glorious, in fact, that they Psalms must be prophetic:

- **Psalm 21:3-4 [flip there]** You welcomed him with rich blessings and placed a crown of pure gold on his head. <sup>4</sup> He asked you for life, and you gave it to him-- length of days, for ever and ever.
- **Psalm 45:1-2 [flip here]** My heart is stirred by a noble theme as I recite my verses for the king... You are the most excellent of men and your lips have been anointed with grace, since God has blessed you forever.
  - **v. 6** Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. *See Heb. 1:8,9*
  - **v. 17** I will perpetuate your memory through all generations; therefore the nations will praise you for ever and ever.
- **Psalm 72:8 [flip there]** He will rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.
  - **vv. 11-12** All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him. <sup>12</sup> For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help.
  - **v. 17** May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun. All nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed.

What do we do with these Psalms? Again, we want to ask what the New Testament say about them. We've already looked at Psalm 2. It tells about this coming Messiah who will be installed as king, and who will dash his enemies like pieces of pottery. Speaking to the Jews in Acts 4, Peter and John say this is about Jesus (Acts 4:26). So does the author of Hebrews (1:5).

- **Psalm 110** proclaims this Messiah as well: "The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.' <sup>2</sup> The LORD will extend your mighty scepter from Zion; you will rule in the midst of your enemies." Jesus quotes this Psalm several times (Matt. 22:41-45, Mark 12:35-37). Peter explicitly says it points to Jesus in his Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:32-36). The author of Hebrews does the same (Heb. 1:13; 4:14 through 5:10, 7:11-28).

As Drew says, the language here is suggestive of more than just the court poet celebrating his local monarch.

### ***Psalms by the Messiah***

But the New Testament authors also use the Psalms in another intriguing way: they put words and experiences of David into the mouth and life of Jesus (Drew, 88). There's a sense in which we read the Psalms as if they were *by* the Messiah, and here especially we find ourselves drawn into far more than the kingly and enthronement Psalms, but the Psalms which represent the broad range of human experience and emotion.

- Jesus clears the temple (John 2:14-17) because, quoting from Psalm 69:9, "Zeal for your house consumes me."
- Jesus goes to his death (John 15:25) because, quoting from Psalms 35:19 and 69:4, "They hated me without reason."
- And describing his own heart's turmoil (John 12:27), Jesus quotes David in Psalm 6:3-4.
- A number of Jesus' last words are taken from the Psalms: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46; Psalm 22:1); "I thirst" (John 19:28; Psalm 69:21); "Into

your hands I commit my Spirit” (Luke 23:46; Psalm 31:5).

- But not just Jesus’ suffering, also his vindication: Peter points to Psalm 16 to explain the resurrection: “You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay” (Acts 2:22-36; Psalm 16:10). Paul seems to describe Gentiles to the nations as the work of the exalted Christ (Romans 15:8-9; Psalm 18:49).
- Even Psalm 22, which Jesus quotes on the cross, is used to describe his ministry today in the church by the author of Hebrews: “Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.<sup>12</sup> He says, ‘I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises’” (2:11-12; Psalm 22:22).

Again and again, the psalmist’s experiences and words are being put into Jesus’ mouth and life. We could look at many more examples. Remember Calvin’s quote? The psalms are “An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul”? Just ask yourself: who is the book of Hebrews speaking about when it says, “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity...For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way...Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” (Heb. 2:14,17,18).

## VI. HOW DO WE READ THE PSALMS AS CHRISTIANS?

There are four broad lessons I think we can take from this about how we are to read the Psalms as Christian.

### ***1. We read them with sensitivity to the Psalm type, original Old Testament meaning, and its location in the canon.***

An explicitly messianic Psalm, like Psalm 2, will be read differently than a song of lament, like Psalm 3, or a confession, like Psalm 51. “In the process of exegesis we will seek to understand the unique features of the individual psalms and their significance in their canonical and historical context” (Goldsworthy, *Whole Bible*, 201).

### ***2. We read them (selectively) as the songs of the perfect God-fearing man—the Messiah.***

Do you remember how I said the book of Psalms is one way God has given us to talk to him in a way that honors him while never minimizing the trials we know? When God the Son became man and put on flesh, he entered into the realm of our temptations, trials, and miseries. Christ was “tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin” (Heb. 4:15). He “offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death” (5:7). And, “he learned obedience from what he suffered” (v. 8). In the Psalms, Drew says, we must listen for the voice of the Messiah, which will open up new depths of understanding for us. Often, we can work so hard at protecting his divinity, we distance ourselves from his humanity. Drew writes,

“When we turn to the words of the Psalter and read them as Christ’s very words, his

humanity suddenly comes to life for us. We understand more fully what it means that our Lord submitted himself to the yoke of our flesh in order to redeem us. Read the words of Psalm 84:1-2—“How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord”—and then picture Jesus at age twelve sitting with the rabbis in his Father’s house...Hear the boy’s quiet words of rebuke to his frantic parents, ‘Why were you searching for me? Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?’ And then wonder with fresh insight at the words of Psalm 27:4, “One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD.” Drew continues: “Jesus understands human suffering...

“Jesus knew the wounds of betrayal and desertion...

‘Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me’ (Ps. 38:11).

‘You have taken from me my closest friends and have made me repulsive to them’ (Ps. 41:9).

“Jesus knew the fear and loneliness that drives us in desperation to God for help...

‘See how my enemies have increase and how fiercely they hate me! Guard my life and rescue me; let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you’ (Ps. 25:1-2).

“Jesus knew, in the face of great suffering, the temptation to doubt God’s love:

‘Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent’ (Ps. 22:1-2).

“Jesus knew physical suffering and death...

“I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me. <sup>15</sup> My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death...they have pierced my hands and my feet” (Ps. 22:14-16).

Remember, Jesus was the second Adam. He is the true Son of God that Adam was not. According to Romans 5, he is the new federal head for all who would be sons of God. And he is the true Israel, the one who could resist temptation for 40 days in the wilderness, pointing back to Israel’s failure in their 40 years in the wilderness.

Jesus, in his birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection, *redoes* redemption history. He does it all over again. Who is that paradigmatic righteous man in Psalm 1? It can only be Christ, or at least, Christ *fulfills* it, just like he fulfilled the law by *keeping the law in its entirety*. He is the ideal of

righteousness in every way throughout the Psalms and throughout the Bible. And so in the Psalms he is both the kingly-Davidic, messianic figure, the new Adam taking dominion over the earth. But he is also the people of God in this fallen order; he is Israel. Goldsworthy: “he is Israel and he is the ruler of Israel” (203). King and servant! And in the psalms, we get him as both king and servant.

And this should be a tremendous source of comfort! He was tempted in every way just as we are, yet was without sin. So we can put our trust in him. Listen to Drew again:

“We can derive immense comfort from reading the Psalms as the word of our Mediator. Read this way, they remind us that there exists a man who lived for us the life that we should live, but fail to do so. There lives a man who loved to be continually in the courts of the Lord—unlike me. There lives a man who knows the full range of human sufferings—better than I do. There lives a man whose sufferings were entirely undeserved—unlike mine. There lives a man who could say, “I wash my hands in innocence, and go about thy altar, O Lord, singing a song of thanksgiving,” a man with “clean hands and a pure heart,” a man who could truly protest his full righteousness and innocence. That man was *not* David (Psalms 32 and 51 make this plain), and it certainly is not I. It is my great Redeemer, the man Jesus, who not only died in my place, but also lived in my place.

“The next time you read, ‘I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord!’” (Psalm 122:1) and are tempted to feel horribly guilty because you would rather be playing golf than worshiping God, remember that these are first and foremost the words of the one true Worshiper who fulfilled all righteousness on your behalf. More likely than not, when you perceive the matter this way, you will want to put your bags aside and go with thanks to praise the One who has so fully saved you” (94-95).

### ***3. We read them for ourselves THROUGH the Mediator.***

As Christians, we know to only approach the throne of our holy God *through* Christ our mediator, and in him we can approach with confidence! In other words, as you read the Psalms, keep Christ—mentally—continually at your side, like a trailblazer who is now leading you down the trail that *he* blazed.

Goldsworthy: “We should not be seduced into thinking that the Psalms can speak from and of themselves to us. If they speak to us of God, they must speak to us of the God who has finally revealed himself in Jesus Christ. If they speak to us of sinners, they speak to us of those who are outside of Christ. If they speak of the judgment of God, they speak to us of the curse of the law that Christ suffered for his people on the cross. If they speak to us of the faithful, the godly, or the righteous, they speak to us first of Christ, and only then of those who are redeemed in Christ” (*Whole Bible*, 200).

Goldsworthy summing up Bruce Waltke: “Waltke concludes that the Psalms now stand as the prayers of Jesus Christ who, as the corporate head of the church, represent all believers in their own prayers. It is because we are in Christ that we can appropriate these prayers as our own”

(*Whole Bible*, 202).

***[Time permitting] 4. We read them (selectively) as a glimpse into the relationship between the Father and Son.***

Listen to these verses, and see if you cannot here the Father and the Son as they interact with one another: Psalm 18: 4-5; 7-8; 13; 16-17, 19-24, 27, 37-39, 50

Drew: “At the most profound theological level, worship is a spectator sport. We gather to watch the Father vindicate his Son in the preaching of the gospel and to watch the Son give praise to his Father in the praises of our lips. For the Spirit Christ indwells us, and that Spirit lives to extol the Father and the Son” (100).