

PSALMS LESSON 1 INTRODUCTION

The objective of this class is to help us understand the book of Psalms and equip us for further in depth study and application of its great truths.

We will learn about the basic structure of the whole book as well as individual psalms. We will understand why the Psalms were written, how they were written, what they talk about and how they can be applied to our lives today.

OVERVIEW OF PSALMS

The term "Psalms" comes from the Greek word "psalmos" which means "song of praise." This was the title used by the translators of the first Greek translation of the Old Testament around the 3rd century B.C.

The term "Psalter" refers to the collection of psalms. Clearly, this is a collection of writings which exude praise (even the lament psalms) for the God of Israel and are clearly to be sung in worship.

The Significance of the Psalms

The book of Psalms is a collection of Hebrew poetry and it stands unique in the world of literature. Its beauty has won an elite status, far surpassing all other poetic literature. Many of the classical poets (e.g. Chaucer, Milton, etc.) were Hebrew scholars steeped in Old Testament poetry. On the popular level, what man or woman has never heard at least part of the 23rd Psalm: *"The Lord is my Shepherd..."?*

Psalms are God's revelation of His character and His ways in response to the common experiences of life. Ultimately, they point to the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The book of Psalms has two features; it is Poetry and Prayer.

Poetry is a language used with intensity. Poetry gets at the heart of existence. Far from being cosmetic language, it is intestinal, it is root language. The poetry requires that we deal with our actual humanity, diving beneath the surfaces of pose, pretense and straight into the depths.

Prayer is language used in relation to God. It gives utterance to what we sense or want or respond to before God. God speaks to us; our answers are our prayers. The answers are not always articulate; it is sometimes in silence, sighs, groaning, etc. Prayer requires that we deal with God who is determined on nothing less than the total renovation of our lives.

PSALMS – 5 BOOKS

Psalms is arranged into 5 books:

- Book I – Psalm 1-41
- Book II – Psalm 42-72
- Book III – Psalm 73-89
- Book IV – Psalm 90-106
- Book V – Psalm 107-150

These 5 books arrangement matches the 5 book beginning of the Bible; the 5 books of Moses. The 5 books of Moses are matched by the 5 books of David. In the 5 books of Moses, God addresses us by His Word, calling us into being and shaping our salvation. In the 5 books of David we personally respond to this word that addresses us.

Psalms help believers today to understand God, themselves, and their relationship to God. Psalms pictures God as the Creator, who is worthy of praise and is capable of using His creative might to rescue His people from current distress; it pictures God as the just judge of the entire world who rewards the righteous and opposes the wicked.

Psalms pictures God as the faithful friend of the oppressed while offering a refresher course in God's faithfulness throughout Israel's history. Most importantly Psalms highlights God's promises to David and his descendants, promises that are not finally realized until Christ.

Finally, Psalms picture the full range of human emotions: joy, despair, guilt, consolation, love, hate, thankfulness, and dissatisfaction, while illustrating human responses to God: praise, confession, pleas for help, and thanksgiving; thus serving as a sourcebook for Christian worship, both publicly and privately.

Psalms reminds us that all of life is under God's lordship.

PSALMS LESSON 2 INTERPRETATION

2 TIMOTHY 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

Our approach to the book of Psalms will often affect our understanding of it. The objective should be to find out what God is communicating through the psalms and learn how we can communicate back to Him. It has been said that while the Bible has to do with scripture speaking **to** us, the book of Psalms also has to do with the scripture speaking **for** us.

With the goal of ordering our own responses to God through our study of the psalms, we must properly understand them as they were written and determine:

- 1) What they meant to the original author(s)
- 2) How they were understood by the original audience
- 3) What God wants us to understand from them now.

There are four things we should be aware of:

The Historical/Musical Background

The question is, "What is the historical setting and background for any given Psalm? Numerous psalms supply some background indicators in the superscriptions; these give us clues to what provided the impetus for writing those psalm.

The Literary Form

As C.S. Lewis points out, "The Psalms must be read as poems, as lyrics, with the entire license and all the formalities, the hyperbola, the emotion rather than logical connections, which are proper to lyric poetry." If this is not recognized then our interpretations will be hopelessly inadequate. Studying poetry includes identifying figures of speech, literary structures and the prevalent use in Hebrew of what is called "parallelism."

The Theological Focus

The term "theology" simply refers to the study of God or the things pertaining to God. Here we want to answer the question: "What do the Psalms say about God and His ways?" This is important because a right response to God is based on a right understanding of who He is! Psalms are a store house of theology!

The Messianic-Eschatological Hope

Our Lord and His apostles taught us to interpret the psalms as referring to the Lord Jesus Christ. Ultimately, they are fulfilled in Christ (one writer counts ninety three times in which the New Testament quotes the psalms-- more than any other Old Testament book).

THE HISTORICAL

The following list identifies psalms which specifically include historical indicators in the superscriptions and gives the corresponding Biblical texts which record that background. Some are clear -- for example

Psalm 51 is rooted in David's affair with Bathsheba. Others are a bit more obscure --Psalm 57 could refer to David's stay in the cave of Adullum (I Sam 22) or to his stay at Engedi (I Sam 24). Many psalms have no historical information supplied and in these cases it is best not to speculate. Psalms with historical references are the following:

Ps. 3	II Sam 15:1-18:33
Ps. 7	The specific incident is obscure, but see I Sam 23:24-29
Ps. 18	I Sam 19:1ff, 24:1ff, II Sam 5:17ff,8:1ff,10:1ff,15:1-18:33,21:15ff, ch. 23
Ps. 30	possibly I Chr. 21:1-22:1 or 21:10-22:2
Ps. 34	I Sam 19:1ff possibly
Ps. 51	II Sam 11-12
Ps. 52	I Sam 22:6ff
Ps. 54	I Sam 23:14ff
Ps. 56	I Sam 21:11ff, 22:1, 27:1ff or similar incident
Ps. 57	I Sam 22:1ff or 24:1ff
Ps. 59	I Sam 19:8ff
Ps. 60	II Sam 8:3ff, 10:15, I Chr. 18:9-12
Ps. 63	I Sam 24:1ff, II Sam 15:1ff
Ps. 142	I Sam 22:1ff or 24:1ff

Week 3
Doorway to the Psalms
Book 1 - Psalms 1-18

Look at Psalms 3:1; 7:10; and 18:27. These are three examples of the three types of parallelisms – synonymous (echoes), antithetic (contrasts), and synthetic (completes). From the three verses above, which represents what type?

1. Does the promises of Genesis 12:1-2 and 2 Samuel 7:12-16 relate to Psalm 2? What is said of Jesus in relation to these promises of Acts 13:33, Romans 1:4, and Hebrews 1:5?

2. In Psalm 3, learning David was the author and it's tied to Absalom's rebellion (2 Samuel 15-16); does it help you better understand the strong language, and the blunt and brutal requests?

3. What do titles such as "to the choirmaster", "stringed instruments" "to the choir", "for the flutes" (Psalm 5) "According to the Sheminith" (Psalm 6) teach you about the nature and use of Psalms?

4. Does Paul's quote in Ephesians 4:26 apply to the many times Psalms are quoted in the New Testament?

5. What does the psalmist ask God to do in Psalm 5 and why?

6. Psalm 6 is the first of the “Penitential Psalms”. What does the psalmist ask God to do for him?

7. Psalm 8 is a “hymn of praise”. What is God praised for? What is said of “man” (human beings)?

8. What does Psalm 9 and 10 have in common; how are they different?

9. In Psalm 11, David chose faith over fear. Name some fears faith must overcome and provide promises that gives great comfort when one may feel threatened.

10. In Psalm 13, how long is repeated 4 times. What help the psalmist wait? Can what help him, help you?

10. Where in Psalm 18 is the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 17) talked about?

Week 4
Love the Lord, All You His Saints
Book 1 - Psalms 19-31

1. What synonyms are used in Psalm 19:7-11? What “is” the Word?

2. Psalms 20 and 21 are “royal psalms”. Psalm 20 is a prayer and Psalm 21 is a thanksgiving. How do they relate to the Messiah? What patterns are fulfilled in the life of Jesus?

3. Psalm 22 is a lament. How does David ask God to help? Why?

4. Read Matthew 27:35-46 and fill in the chart below showing where Matthew’s account refers back to the listed verses:

<u>Psalm 22</u>	<u>Matthew 27</u>
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Psalm 22:18

Psalm 22:7

Psalm 22:8

Psalm 22:1

5. Psalm 23 is a “psalm of confidence” What images does David use for God’s presence, provision, and protection?

6. Based on the creation pattern of Genesis 1, certain psalms were assigned to each day of the week. What day do you think Psalm 24 was assigned to and why?

7. What does David ask God to do for him in Psalm 25, a lament, structured in an acrostic pattern? Does it end in the way most laments do?

8. What does a picture of “genuine faith” look like in Psalm 27 and a picture of “praise” in Psalm 29?

9. Some psalms depict God as a king, warrior, judge, father and even a protective mother bird. What image is used for God in Psalm 28? What does that teach us?

10. As a “hymn of thanksgiving”, some psalms communal and others are individual. What does Psalm 30 thank God for?

11. Compare Psalm 31 and Luke 23:46. How does the psalmist exhibit personal faith in God?

Week 5
Surrounded By Steadfast Love
Book 1 - Psalms 32-41

1. Psalm 32, a “penitential psalm” sings of forgiveness. Sometimes it is referred to as one of “the Pauline psalms” because of similarity of Paul’s theology for forgiveness of sins (Romans 4:6-8). How is the forgiveness of sins illustrated, paying attention to verse 11? Forgiveness leads to what?

2. How does Peter use Psalm 34:8-9, 12-16 in 1 Peter 2:3 and 3:12? What is the threefold witness of what the Lord does for His own do you find in this psalm?

3. What are some reasons for rejoicing in Psalm 35:7-8 and 11-16? Compare these verses with John 15:25 on Jesus’ use of Psalm 35:19.

4. The Lord’s “steadfast love” is a major theme in the Psalms. According to Psalm 36:7-9, how is that attribute illustrated?

5. Review Psalm 37:9, 11, and 29 for the piece or real estate being talked about. Jesus uses the first half of verse 11 in Matthew 5:5. Is He referring to the same land?

6. What are the synonyms for sin in Psalm 38:1-8? What are the images for iniquities? How would you describe sin?

7. In Psalm 39, what should we know about ourselves in light of God? How can you deal with this weakness?

8. Admissions and confession of sin are major themes in Psalms 38-41. List some verses that indicate admission and/or confession of sin. List verses that state the remedy to our sin situation.

Week 6
Why Are You Cast Down, O My Soul
Book 2 - Psalms 42-56

- 1. Psalms 42-43 share a refrain, likely written as a unified lament. Find that refrain. As you read these two psalms as one poem, what is the progression of thought? Prepare a brief biographical sketch of the author.**

- 2. Who is the speaker in Psalm 44? Is this a personal or corporate lament? What event is described in verse 2? On what basis does the psalmist appeal to God to “wake” (v.23)?**

- 3. In the psalter, what is unique about Psalms 45? How the verses of Hebrew 1:8-9 cite Psalm 45:6-7? Do these verses teach about Christ?**

- 4. Identify the refrain in Psalm 46 and determine how it summarizes the poet’s theme. What encouragement does this psalm bring to those who feel trapped in a difficult circumstance?**

- 5. How do the titles and thoughts of the following verses relate to Genesis 12:1-3 and Matthew 28:19-20:**

Psalm 47:7, 9 Psalm 48:9-10 Psalm 49:1

- 6. How does Psalm 48 demonstrate the balance between a horizontal dimension and a vertical dimension?**

- 7. In reading Psalm 50, what is said about God? Do you agree or disagree that both believers and non-believers are humanizing God?**

- 8. the most 'Penitential Psalm is Psalm 51. What is the specific sin and confrontation that was the impetus for writing this psalm? Aside from being historical and intensely personal, what are the instructional elements?**

- 9. How does god sustain His people when they are clearly a persecuted minority in Psalm 52?**

- 10. Compare Psalm 53 with Psalm 14, 60, 70, and 108. What are the differences and what do they emphasize?**

- 11. What is unique about who harms David in Psalm 55? Can verses 22-23 help? Read also 1 Peter 5:7.**

- 12. Where is "trust" used and expressed in imagery in Psalm 56?**

Week 7
Let the Nations Be Glad
Book 2 - Psalms 57-72

1. What does imagery in Psalms 57:4; 58:6-9; and 59:1-7 teach us about David enemies? How are Christians to pray verses like Psalms 58:10 and 59:12-13?

2. Why is it impossible for a believer to live endlessly in defeat? How can we apply Psalm 60:12 to our lives?

3. In Psalms 61:-4-5 and 62:2, what are the metaphors for God, and how can these images foster confidence in God, especially when individuals and churches are faced with opposition or despair?

4. Of the 14 “historical psalms”, eight of them are Psalms 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, and 63. Those psalms were born out of specific historical specifics and worked for public worship in Israel. Do they work today; can we personally apply Psalm 63 to our lives?

5. Psalm 64 shares many themes in Psalm 63. List those themes and provide the three requests given in Psalm 64?

6. In Psalm 65, how does David express his gratitude? What was the occasion for his gratitude?

7. Look at Psalm 66:4 and Psalm 67:3-5. Who does or will worship God?

8. With several verses for Psalm 69, how do the New Testament writes portray Christ in light of this Psalm? Complete the table below.

<u>Psalm 69 – what verse</u>	<u>New Testament</u>	<u>Christ Connection</u>
	John 2:17	
	John 15:25	
	John 19:28-29	
	Acts 1:20	
	Romans 11:9-10	
	Romans 15:3	

9. Psalm 71 is unique in that it speaks to generational praise. What generations are talked about and in what verses?

10. What qualities of a leader do Psalm 72 sees as desirable? What themes are shared in Luke 1:46-55 and Psalm 72?

Lesson 8
Truly God Is Good to Israel
Book 3 - Psalms 73-78

- 1. What do Psalms 73-78 teach you about God's character and concerns? Write a list of specifics.**

- 2. What is the psalmist's problem in Psalm 73? How does he vividly describe the people behind his problem? How is the problem resolved?**

- 3. Why does God seem silent in the first half of Psalm 74 (vv. 1-11)? What has happened and what hasn't God done that the psalmist thought He would do? In the second half (vv. 12-23), what changes?**

- 4. Looking at Psalm 75, what is surprising about its lyrical content? In the church today, we rarely sing lyrics like that. Why not; should we?**

- 5. How should we read Psalm 76 in light of Jesus' claim that He is the center of the canon even though it was written before Christ was born, crucified and raised?**

- 6. Find the repeated key words in Psalm 77. How do these words help us arrive at the psalm's theme?**

- 7. Psalm 78 is a 'historical psalm' or a 'psalm of remembrance'. What are the historical acts recounted? Why are the "glorious deeds of the Lord" recounted?**

Week 9
Glorify Your Name
Book 3 - Psalm 79-89

1. With Psalm 1:2 in mind, prayerfully read Psalm 79 and list five observations. Circle the one observation that you think is most central to the psalm's main theme.

2. What is the refrain of Psalm 80? What metaphors are used? How do these images aid the author's message?

3. Psalm 81 is a "prophetic hymn", which echoes themes found in the Prophets, calling the people to covenant faithfulness. What was the cost of Israel's disobedience? What is the cost of disobedience today?

4. In reading John 10:34-35, how did Jesus use psalm 82?

5. Israel used Psalm 83 when they were threatened by Gentile enemies. When and how would today's Christians use this psalm? What is the best weapon against aggression?

6. Psalm 84 is divided into three parts with the word "blessed" either ending or starting a division. What are the three divisions and summarize the blessing associated with each?

7. How do Psalms 85-86 aid prayer life by teaching Christians how to pray and what to pray for? Is a sense of inadequacy helpful or harmful when you face life's battles?

8. In Psalm 88, what are the questions Herman asked? Do you agree or disagree that it is alright to question the Lord's fairness?

9. Of the 12 psalms that focus on God's covenant with Israel, Psalm 89 notably teaches of God's covenant relationship. How does this psalm anticipate the coming of Jesus and the new covenant (Matthew 1:12-16; Luke 3:23-38)?

Week 10
My Foot Slips
Book 4 - Psalms 90-106

- 1. When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, Satan quoted Psalm 91:11-12. How did Satan use those verses (Matthew 4:6) and how did Jesus respond in trust (Matthew 4:1-11)?**

- 2. Psalm 92 is one of the psalms written for the weekly Sabbath worship, a day of “holy convocation”. How does that focus shed light on the theme of Psalm 92? Are the comparisons appropriate?**

- 3. How does Psalm 93, along with Psalms 95-99, express God’s kingship? Do you see any practical benefits in the fact that the “Lord’s statures” stand firm?**

- 4. In Psalm 94, unjust leaders in Israel triggered prayers for the Lord’s revenge. How is injustice connected to disregard for the Lord? How are these verses used in Romans 11:2, 1 Corinthians 3:20, and Hebrews 12:5-6?**

- 5. Psalm 95:1-7 are often used as a call to worship in contemporary church as a call to worship while 7b-11 is ignored. Why might this be the case?**

- 6. There are three sections in Psalm 96. Find the commands and list the references to Gentiles.**

- 7. What mighty acts of salvation would the first singers of Psalm 98 recount in their worship? What additional acts can we add as Christians?**

- 8. Using Psalm 101, what resources can help lead a blameless life of worship and service? What is the difference between blameless and perfect?**

- 9. Psalms 104-106 recall the storyline from creation to the exile. Write down the major events mentioned in Israel’s history.**

Week 11
I Will Awake the Dawn
Book V – Psalm 107-119

1. Notice the word “some” in Psalm 107. Designate the four different groups and summarize what is said about each group during the exile.

2. What in particular is God praised for in Psalm 108? Are you facing a new challenge that only God can help with?

3. The psalmist is persecuted in Psalm 109. What does he pray for (vv6-20)? Why does he pray in this way - what has the wicked man done?

4. What three significant offices do Psalm 110 mentions? How does Jesus fulfil each of these offices?

5. Both Psalm 111 and Psalm 112 illuminates each other. What does Psalm 111 say about “the Lord”? What does Psalm 112 say about “the man who feared the Lord”? What practical value do you see in fearing the Lord?

6. What themes do Psalms 113-118 share?

7. What historical events are alluded to in Psalm 114? Give at least two examples.

8. Psalm 115 gives a picture of Israel’s God verses the nations’ idols. What is said about God; what is said about idols (Isaiah 44:9-20)?

9. Can Psalm 116, a personal psalm of thanksgiving; help you grow in your “love” for the Lord? What did the “cup of cup of salvation” represent (vs 13)?

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in Psalm and the longest chapter in the Bible. It uses synonyms for God’s written revelations. What are those synonyms and the psalmist’s attitudes and actions to each word?

Week 12
The Songs of Accents
Book 5 – Psalms 120-134

- 1. What occasion prompted the writing of Psalm 120-134? What three responsibilities must be fulfilled if burdens are to become blessings? How do believers live like unbelievers?**

- 2. Psalm 121 is a psalm of protection. What repeated phrases emphasize this theme? Does verse guarantee nothing will harm you?**

- 3. Do you agree or disagree that churches must provide entertainment to draw people to them? Should we attend church to gain something or give something? Does Psalm 122 provide any insight?**

- 4. In Psalm 126, what phrases are repeated three times? Why should Israel act with that emotion and what reasons are given?**

- 5. Psalms 127 and 128 mention specific blessings of children. What are they, do they apply today? Why or why not?**

- 6. What are the different words used to express faith in Psalms 125, 128 and 130? What are the images used in Psalms 130 and 131? Are there any differences between the faithful and backsliders?**

- 7. Psalm 132 is the only one of these 15 psalms that is quoted in the New Testament. Compare Psalm 132:5 with Acts 7:46; Psalm 132:11 with Acts 2:30 and Psalm 132:17 with Luke 1:69. What light do these New Testament texts shed on the Old Testament psalm?**

- 8. What is the central theme of Psalm 133? What images are used to explain the theme? How do these images help explain the theme? Whom and what are Israel and the church united around?**

- 9. What two psalms call for God's people to respond to "let Israel now say"? What might the purpose be for this structure?**

Week 13
Let Everything That Has Breath
Book 5 – Psalms 135 – 150

1. Psalm 135 labeled God “good” and “great”. Why? Compare His person and works with other gods.

2. Psalm 136 expands upon the themes of Psalm 135. Note the repetition of verses 1 and 26 and the obvious refrain in every verse. What are the three main historical events described? What does David give thanks for in Psalm 138?

3. Psalm 137 ends with a ferocious curse. What is it? What do you think of the strong words of vengeance against those who have hurt him?

4. Psalms 138-145 are the final collection of psalms contributed to David. With Psalm 139 being the most popular because of its theme, read verses 19-22 and determine if there is a surprise about these verses. Do they make sense in light of the rest of the psalm?

5. In Psalm 140, how does David deal with the apparent problem King Saul’s officers had with him? What can we do to represent Christ in appropriate ways?

6. Some psalmists accept their situation quietly, while others show their exasperation by questioning God (Psalm 142). Is it right to talk to God this way – to “pour out our complaint before Him”?

7. Does the confidence in answered prayer displayed in Psalm 143:12 relate to the petition in verse 11?

8. Psalms 135 and 150 starts with "Praise the Lord". Psalms 135, 146, 147, 148, 149, and 150 begin and end with "Praise the Lord". All 6 verses of Psalm 150 contain the imperative "praise". List at least three reasons given for such exuberant worship.

9. Psalm 149:6-9 speaks of godly people judging the nations. Verse 9 begins "to execute on them the judgement written"! Is this a prophecy referring to Revelation 19:11-21? If not, what written judgement is the psalmist referring to?

10. Psalms mention a variety of instruments used in worship. What are the instruments used in worship listed in Psalm 150:3-5. The psalms also mention a number of places from which God can be praised. What other places are mentioned?