

Psalm

1. Introduction and Chapter 1

August 2, 2007

When we hear the word 'Psalm', if you are a Christian who has been around some-time, you know where that Book is located in the Bible and how many chapters and so on. But if you are not familiar with the Bible, you can only think of one thing, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want..." from Psalm 23.

A. WHAT IS THE BOOK OF PSALMS?

So what is the Book of Psalm? The Book of Psalms was the hymnbook for the children of Israeli and for the early church. It is a book of poetry that was set to music from the first chapter to the last. We usually associate rhythm and rhyme with poetry but they are not the major elements of Hebrew poetry. Hebrew poetry usually involves multiplying and building thoughts using repetition, contrast, restatement and parallels.

As the Book grew over the centuries – many scholars believe that it went from 1490-444 B.C., its contents were adapted by the Jews for their corporate worship as well as for their personal devotions. In this collection we find prayers from sufferers, hymns of praise, confessions of sin, confessions of faith, nature hymns and songs. However, each one the focal point for faith is the Lord.

The psalms teach us to have a personal relationship with God as we tell Him our hurts and our needs and as we meditate on His greatness and glory.

This is a book of praises directed to God. Interestingly, in both the Hebrew and the Greek, the terms used in the title of the book have the same root meaning: "playing an instrumental piece of music." Over the centuries it was the singing to musical accompaniment that came more sharply into focus.

If you pay close attention in your reading of the psalms you'll notice musical notations sprinkled throughout the Book. Note the word "Selah," for example – which possibly means "pause," or "think on that." If you are involved in public speaking, or in composing instrumental music, you know there are times when a pause is just as significant as the loudest crescendo. "Pause and think on that."

B. AUTHORS

We often refer to this book as "The Psalms of David". Yes, he wrote more psalms than anyone else-at least 73 of them. Asaph was credited with 12 psalms. The sons of Korah wrote 12 chapters. Solomon wrote two. Moses wrote at least one. Heman and Ethan, who were 'Ezrahites,' were credited with writing one each. About forty of the psalms are anonymous-some have called them 'orphan psalms.' In other words, they were born but no one knows who the parents were.

C. CONTENTS

One of the beautiful facets of the psalms is that each one is born out of its own unique context. You will scale the heights of celebration and ecstasy and you will plunge to the depths of conflict and agony. You will walk with David, Asaph, Solomon and Moses through the joys of healing and deliverance, as well as through the heartache of despair and guilt. Psalms is, of course, the most emotional of all the books of the Bible. Each psalm adds its own matchless contribution to the whole collection.

D. PAY ATTENTION TO THE DETAILS

In order to read the psalms correctly, we want to heed two technical hints.

1) Read the superscriptions

Superscriptions are the words that appear just beneath the titles of many psalms. You may be surprised to hear this, but these words are also inspired. They are just as much a part of the psalm as any of its verses. In Psalm 3, which begins, "A psalm of David. When he fled from Absalom his son." When we pay close attention to the superscription, we gain a feel for the psalm.

If you have a son or a daughter who is going through a time of rebellion, Psalm 3 is for you. It was composed in a time of extremely difficult conflict in David's home. These words of introduction to many of the psalms give us the setting and spirit of what is to follow. So read these words carefully and let them help the message of the psalm come alive in your heart.

2) Read the psalms the way an artist views his or her work

If you tend to look at things literally, you may have trouble getting into the spirit of the psalms. If you are a person who loves the arts and music, you may very well find depths of truth in the psalms that you will find nowhere else in Scripture. Why? Simply because they were written by musicians. The authors were gifted in music and/or poetry; they have expressed a series of profound truths that are not meant so much to be analyzed as to be felt and experienced.

E. FIVE SEGMENTS

The psalms are divided into five books.

1) Humanity – Psalms 1-41 Coincides with Genesis

Many of these psalms describe humans as blessed, fallen and redeemed by God. David wrote most of these psalms. They are very personal in nature.

2) Deliverance – Psalms 42-72 Coincides with Exodus

These 31 songs have much to say about trouble and God's power to deliver us from that trouble. In these psalms we find encouragement and strength for all who are in the midst of struggles.

3) The sanctuary – Psalms 73-89 Coincides with Leviticus

Many of the psalms were originally sung in the temple as the people worshiped. The psalms in this section, many of which are attributed to Asaph, leader of one of David's Levitical choirs, contain prayers of the ancient Israelites as they drew near to their Lord in worship.

4) God's righteous reign over all the earth – Psalms 90-106 Coincides with Numbers

The power of the everlasting God is celebrated in the context of all the experiences of humanity—a power demonstrated in God’s anger as well as in His unfailing love. His reign is eternal, universal and invincible!

5) The Word of God – Psalms 107-150 Coincides with Deuteronomy

The last 44 hymns in the collection of psalms celebrate the greatness of God and His revelation -particularly as it is given to us in His Word. Certainly Psalm 119 is the most famous of these psalms.

F. THE FORMAT WE ARE GOING TO USE IN THE STUDY OF THIS BOOK

If you’ve been coming to our church for sometime, you are familiar with my teaching style – an expository style. Going from verse to verse, yet still I choose one major theme of that particular section of study. At the end of the study, I give you two or three applications within the theme we studied.

However, in the Book of Psalm, that style of study may not work. As we just have learned that each Psalm goes from one situation to another, from one author of 1200 some year B.C. to 500 some year B.C. It would be almost impossible to find connecting theme from each consecutive chapters.

So, you will find yourself receiving several different topical applications at the end of each study. By the way, we will not study the entire 150 Psalms at one time. Rather, we will divide it into several segments and study them as the Lord leads with other Books from the Bible in between.

Psalm 1

Psalm 1:1-3 Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; 2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night. 3 He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.

Blessed translates the Hebrew word “*esher*,” which has the idea of happiness or contentment. “*Esher*” comes from the Hebrew word “*ashar*”, which in its root means “to be straight” or “to be right.” The righteous man will be a blessed man, a happy man.

With all the advice that comes to us, from so many different sources, the righteous man knows how to stay away from the counsel of the ungodly. Many fail at this point. They do not even consider whether counsel is godly or ungodly.

The righteous man is also discerning enough to know the counsel of the ungodly can come from one’s own self. Our own conscience, our own mind, our own heart, can give us ungodly counsel. A good example was shown from David while he was running from king Saul in 1 Samuel 27.

1 Samuel 27:1 And David said in his heart, “Now I shall perish someday by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape to the land of the Philistines; and Saul will despair of me, to seek me anymore in any part of Israel. So I shall escape out of his hand.”

The righteous man knows where to find completely godly counsel.

Psalm 119:24 Your testimonies also are my delight And my counselors.

God's Word is always the best counselor, and godly counselors will always bring the truth of God's Word to help someone who wants counseling.

When I read v2, I had to ask myself, "What is my delight? What does make me happy?" Oh, we can come up with all the spiritual answers. But the answer is plainly and simply exposed in our lives – whatever we cherish and put it as our first priority.

If personal pleasure is the only thing that makes you happy, then you are a selfish, self-centered person. If being with your family or friends delights you, that can be better, but it still falls short. The righteous man finds his delight in the law of the LORD which is the Word of God.

Martin Luther, the Great Reformer said, "I can not live in paradise without the Word of God, but I can live well enough in hell with it." It shows his priority.

If a person delights in something, you don't have to beg them to do it or to like it. They will do it all by themselves. You can measure a person's delight for the Word of God by how much he hungers for it.

In v2 we find the word "*meditate*". It is one of those words that some Christians don't like it, because we heard so much of it from the Eastern religions. But Christians should meditate on God's Word.

In eastern meditation, the goal is to empty the mind. This is dangerous, because an empty mind may present an open invitation to deception or a demonic spirit. But in Christian meditation, the goal is to fill your mind with the Word of God. This can be done by carefully thinking about each word and phrase, and applying it to one's self and praying it back to the Lord. Many Christians merely read the Word, but they do not meditate on it, so it doesn't become theirs.

The tree planted by the river of water can have a great water source and grows well and bears a lot of fruits. Of course, the water, here is the Word of God that is written by the Holy Spirit.

The righteous man bears fruit, such as the fruit of the Spirit from Galatians 5:22-23. The fruit comes naturally from this tree, because it is planted by the rivers of water. It is abiding in a life-source, as Jesus spoke of bearing fruit in John 15:5 as we abide in Him.

Fruit also has a season. Some get discouraged when they begin to walk as a righteous man, and fruit is not immediately evident. They need to wait until they bring forth fruit in its season.

Psalm 1:4-6 The ungodly are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind drives away. 5 Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the ungodly shall perish.

The godly are compared to a tree-strong, permanent, beautiful, useful, fruitful. But the ungodly are compared to chaff. They have no roots and they are blown with the wind. They are useless to the plans of God and they are neither beautiful nor fruitful.

John the Baptist used a similar picture in Matt. 3:10-12 when he described God as a harvester, visiting the threshing floor and separating the grain from the chaff and He will burn up the chaff. What a tragedy for people to spend their whole life on earth as chaff and, as far as eternal things are concerned, amount to nothing!

V5 makes the placement of the ungodly people rather clear to us. They won't be able to join in the rank of the congregation of the righteous. Unfortunately there are more ungodly people than godly in human history.

The ungodly are on a broad path that may seem comfortable now, and gives them lots of company, but in the end they shall perish.

Matthew 7:13 "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it."

On the last note, I like the way how this particular Psalm started with "Blessed" and ends with "perish." What a contrast!

G. APPLICATIONS

1) With all the advice that comes to us, from so many different sources, the righteous man knows how to stay away from the counsel of the ungodly.

Many fail at this point. They do not even consider if counsel is godly or ungodly.

2) We can measure a person's delight for the Word of God by how much he hungers for it.

3) In Christian meditation, the goal is to fill your mind with the Word of God. This can be done by carefully thinking about each word and phrase, and applying it to one's self and praying it back to the Lord.

Many Christians merely read the Word, but not meditate it, so it doesn't become theirs.