



In each lesson, we will review several examples of the different types of Psalms. At the conclusion of each lesson will be the recommended reading in advance for the class and the two lessons we will review.

#### Schedule

1. Introduction to the Psalms (see attachment)
2. The Hallelujah Praise Psalms
3. The Lament Psalms
4. The Thanksgiving Psalms
5. The Historical Psalms
6. The Psalms of Confidence
7. The Wisdom and Didactic Psalms
8. The Messianic Psalms
9. The Penitential/Imprecatory Psalms
10. The Hallel Psalms
11. The Shepherd Psalms



## Lesson 1 | Introduction to The Psalms

THE BOOK OF PSALMS has been and will always be an invaluable guide for devotion, prayer and praise of God's people. The book was titled The Hebrew word *Tehillim* and means "the book of praises." When the Old Testament was translated into Greek, the Septuagint (LXX) used *psalmos* which means, "a striking, twanging or a striking the chords of a musical instrument of a pious song, a psalm." [Theological Dictionary of the New Testament]. Translated into Latin, the Vulgate followed the LXX. The King James Bible adopted the word and hence, we now call this collection, Psalms.

### Why Are The Psalms Important?

After Isaiah, **Psalms is the most frequently quoted Old Testament book** in the New Testament.

- Psalms were important to Jesus:
  - Jesus said that Psalms spoke of Him: "Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44).
  - On the Cross Jesus cried out the words of Psalm 22:1. The Apostles used the psalms to prove that Jesus was the Messiah (see Acts 2:24-36; 12:29-39).
- Psalms also played an important role in the early church:
  - "Do not get drunk with wine, which is debauchery, but be filled by the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music in your hearts to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:18-19).
  - "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and exhorting one another with all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, all with grace in your hearts to God" (Colossians 3:16).
- The psalms have been important throughout church history. Chrysostom and Augustine penned commentaries on the psalms.
  - John Calvin said: "This book I am wont to style an anatomy of all parts of the soul; for no one will discover in himself a single feeling whereof the image is not reflected in this mirror. Nay, all griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, anxieties – in short, all those tumultuous agitations wherewith the minds of men are wont to be tossed – the Holy Ghost hath here represented to the life."
  - Luther said of the psalms: "The Psalter is the favorite book of all the saints ... [Each person], whatever his circumstances may be, finds in [the book] psalms and words which are appropriate to the circumstances in which he finds himself and meet his needs as adequately as if they were composed exclusively for his sake, and in such a way that he himself could not improve on them nor find or desire any better psalms or words."

### What Is Their Unique Contribution?

- **The psalms are poetry.**
  - Psalms are poetry but not the kind of poetry to which many of us are accustomed. Hebrew poetry is not like ours. When we think of poetry, we think of rhyming lines like: Mary had a little lamb | Its fleece was white as snow. | And everywhere that Mary went, | The lamb was sure to go.
  - Hebrew poetry does not rely heavily on rhyme; it is based upon repetition and development of thought from one line to the next. This repetition is called parallelism.
    - In synonymous parallelism, the first line echoes in the second with only a slight change of terms: "Why do the nations cause a commotion? Why are the countries devising plots that will fail? (Psalm 2:1; see also 3:1).
    - In antithetical parallelism, the words of the first line are affirmed in the second, not by repetition, but by contrast: "Certainly the Lord rewards the behavior of the godly, but the behavior of the wicked is self-destructive" (Psalm 1:6; see also 40:4).
    - In climactic parallelism, the second line refines, develops, and completes the thought of the first: "Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the nations, ascribe to the Lord splendor and strength!" (Psalm 96:7).
    - There are other types of parallelism, but this gives you some examples of how parallelism is the backbone of Hebrew poetry.
  - The Psalms have different "kinds" of songs in the titles: the "Maskil" ((Ps 32, 42, 44, 45, 52, 53, 54, 55, 74, 78, 88, 89, 142), the "Mikhtam" (Ps 16, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60), and the "Shaggion" (7).
  - Poetry facilitates the expression of deep feelings and emotions. Because the psalms are poetry,

then, they are interpreted differently than historical narrative. We'll find figures of speech and exaggerations. It is not always right to start with the literal. For example, "Let the rivers clap their hands! Let the mountains sing in unison (Psalm 98:8). The psalms are songs.

- The terms found at the heading of many psalms are often musical terms. Sometimes there will be a reference to the "choir director" in the first verse of psalm (e.g., Psalms 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, etc.). Various musical instruments are mentioned, such as the flute (Psalm 5) and stringed instruments (Psalms 4, 6, 54, 55). Music played a vital part in the worship of ancient Israel, just as it has in the church through the ages and down to the present.
  - Martin Luther once said, "He who despises music ... does not please me. Music is a gift of God, not a gift of men... After theology, I accord to music the highest place and the greatest honor." Music was not an incidental part of the Jewish worship not should it be in our worship; it plays a fundamental role in worship – and has in our lives.
    - David's music somehow calmed the demonically troubled spirit of Saul (1 Samuel 16:14-23).
    - Prophetic revelations through God's Spirit were closely linked with music in at least a couple of instances (1 Kings 10:5-6, 9-11; 2 Kings 3:15).
  - The ancient Israelites knew the tune to at least some of the psalms:
    - For the music director; according to the tune of "lilies;" by the Korachites, a well-written poem, a love song (preface to Psalm 45).
- **The psalms are expressions of worship** | The psalms reflect the human response to his God in the light of his circumstances. The range of those circumstances is broad. Often, the psalms are one's public response to God as an outgrowth of a more private encounter with God.
  - Psalmists express their worship to God as the fulfillment of their vow to praise God publicly for His intervention in their lives in answer to their petitions: "From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will perform before those who fear Him" (Psa 22:25; see also 66:13-16). The psalmist frequently urges his fellow-Israelites to join him in worshipping God.
  - In Romans 12:15, we are exhorted to, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep."
  - The psalms actually facilitate this. We are enabled not only to enter into the experience of the psalmists, but also to enter into their inner thoughts, especially their thoughts about God (Psa 42:1-9).
- **The psalms are prayers.**
  - (Ps 86, 90, 102, 142). This kind of psalm is just what it sounds like: a direct plea or request to the Lord. This collection of the prayers of David son of Jesse ends here (Psa 72:20).
- **The psalms are instruction.**
  - The psalms are a summation, a condensation, of Old Testament theology. The psalms are rich in their content so far as doctrine is concerned. We find the attributes of God to be a constant theme, the law the way it was meant to be viewed in the psalms and the psalms also summarize the history of God's dealings with man in the Old Testament (see Psa 78, 105). The psalms contain a great deal of prophecy. The psalms make it easier to learn God's Word and to memorize it. Psalm 119, for example, is arranged alphabetically. Each segment of the psalm begins with the next letter of the alphabet. The psalms are rich in instruction. What incredible insight we are given concerning the Old Testament law.

### Authors of the Psalms

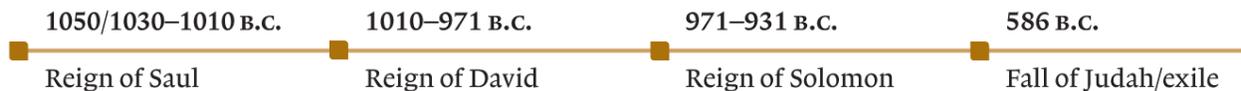
- **David:** David is the principle writer of the Psalms, with 73 credited to him in their titles. Samuel referred to David as "the sweet psalmist of Israel" (2Samuel 23:1).
- **Sons of Korah:** The Sons of Korah are credited for writing 11 or 12 psalms. The Sons of Korah were Levites who held positions of prominence during the reign of David (1Chronicles 9:19; 12:6), and continued to hold a place of honor as temple servants to the time of Hezekiah (2Chronicles 20:19).
- **Asaph:** Asaph was one of the heads of David's choir in Jerusalem (1Chronicles 6:39; 15:17-19; 16:5), and is responsible for authoring 11 psalms.
- **Solomon:** David's successor and son, Solomon, is credited for writing 2 psalms (Psa 72 and 127).
- **Heman:** Heman, the first of three Levites appointed by David to lead in the musical services (1Chronicles 2:6; 6:33; 25:5), is credited for writing 1 psalm (Psalm 88)
- **Ethan:** Ethan, a friend of Solomon and renowned for his wisdom (1Kings 4:31; 1Chronicles 2:6, 8; 6:39-

44; 15:17, 19), wrote 1 psalm (Psa 89).

- **Moses:** Moses the Lawgiver is also credited for having written 1 psalm (Psa 90)
- **Various Anonymous Writers:** Nearly one-third of the psalms, 49 in all, were written anonymously.

The Following is from the ESV.org website.

Individual psalms come from diverse periods of Israel's history, but at every stage they served as the songbook of God's people. David wrote about half of the Psalms. His role as king was more than that of a ruler. He was to represent and even embody the people, and their well-being was tied to his faithfulness. David, then, writes as a representative, and the readers must discern whether the emphasis of a psalm is more on his role as ruler or more on his role as ideal Israelite, in which he is an example for all. The historical occasions mentioned in the psalm titles help the reader see how faith applies to real-life situations.



### Key Themes |

The Psalter is fundamentally the hymnbook of God's people. It takes the basic themes of OT theology and turns them into song:

1. **Monotheism.** The one God, Maker and Ruler of all, will vindicate his goodness and justice in his own time. Everyone must know and love this God, whose purity, power, wisdom, faithfulness, and unceasing love are breathtakingly beautiful.
2. **Creation and fall.** Though God made man with dignity and purpose, all people since the fall are beset with sins and weaknesses that only God's grace can heal.
3. **Election and covenant.** The one true God chose a people for himself and bound himself to them by his covenant. This covenant expressed God's intention to save his people, and through them to bring light to the world.
4. **Covenant membership.** In his covenant, God offers grace to his people: forgiveness of their sins, the shaping of their lives to reflect his own glory, and a part to play as light to the Gentiles. Each member of God's people is responsible to believe God's promises and to grow in obeying his commands. Those who do this enjoy the full benefits of God's love and find delight in knowing him. The well-being of God's people as a whole affects the well-being of each member. Each one shares the joys and sorrows of the others. When believers suffer, they should not seek revenge but should pray. They can be confident that God will make all things right in his own time.
5. **Eschatology.** The story of God's people is headed toward a glorious future, in which all kinds of people will come to know the Lord. The personal faithfulness of God's people contributes to his ultimate purpose. The Messiah, the ultimate heir of David, will lead his people in the great task of bringing light to the Gentiles.

### Types of Psalms |

The Psalms can be identified according to some basic categories:

- **Laments**, which lay a troubled situation before the Lord, asking him for help. There are community (Psalm 12) and individual (Psalm 13) laments. This category is the largest by far, including up to a third of all Psalms.
- **Hymns of praise**, which call God's people to admire his great attributes and deeds. Examples include Psalms 8; 93; and 145.
- **Hymns of thanksgiving.** As with laments, there are community (Psalm 9) and individual (Psalm 30) thanksgiving psalms.
- **Hymns celebrating God's law** (Psalm 119).
- **Wisdom psalms** (Psalms 1; 37), which reflect themes from the Wisdom Books (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon).

- **Songs of confidence**, which enable worshipers to deepen their trust in God amid difficult circumstances (Psalm 23).
- **Royal psalms**, which present the Davidic monarchy as the vehicle of blessing for God's people. Some of these are prayers (Psalm 20), some are thanksgivings (Psalm 21). All relate to the Messiah, the ultimate heir of David, either by setting a pattern (Psalms 20–21) or by portraying the king's reign in such a way that only the Messiah can completely fulfill it (Psalms 2; 72), or by focusing on the future (Psalm 110).
- **Historical psalms**, which take lessons from the history of God's dealings with his people (Psalm 78).
- **Prophetic hymns**, which echo the Prophets, calling people to covenant faithfulness (Psalm 81).

### Structure of the Psalter |

The standard Hebrew text divides the Psalter into five "books," perhaps in imitation of the five books of the Pentateuch.

- **Book 1** \_\_\_\_\_ **Psalms 1–41**
  - Psalms 1–2 provide an introduction to the Psalms as a whole. Except for Psalms 10 and 33, the remaining psalms of Book 1 are psalms of David. Most of them are prayers of distress. Others are statements of confidence in the God who alone can save (e.g., 9; 11; 16; 18), striking the note that concludes the book (40–41). Reflections on ethics and worship are found in Psalms 1; 14–15; 19; 24; and 26.
- **Book 2** \_\_\_\_\_ **Psalms 42–72**
  - Book 2 introduces the first group of psalms by the "sons of Korah" (42; 44–49; 50). There are also more psalms of David (51–65; 68–69), including most of the "historical" psalms (51–52; 54; 56–57; 59–60; 63). Once again, lament and distress dominate these prayers, which now also include a communal voice (e.g., 44; compare 67; 68). The lone psalm attributed to Solomon concludes Book 2 with a look at God's ideal for Israel's kings—ultimately pointing to Christ as the final great King of God's people.
- **Book 3** \_\_\_\_\_ **Psalms 73–89**
  - The tone darkens further in Book 3. The opening Psalm 73 starkly questions the justice of God before seeing light in God's presence. That light has almost escaped the psalmist in Psalm 88, the bleakest of all psalms. Book 2 ended with the high point of royal aspirations; Book 3 concludes in Psalm 89 with these expectations badly threatened. Sharp rays of hope occasionally pierce the darkness (e.g., 75; 85; 87). The brief third book contains most of the psalms of Asaph (73–83), as well as another set of Korah psalms (84–85; 87–88).
- **Book 4** \_\_\_\_\_ **Psalms 90–106**
  - Psalm 90 opens the fourth book of the psalms. It may be seen as the first response to the problems raised by Book 3. Psalm 90, attributed to Moses, reminds the worshiper that God was active on Israel's behalf long before David. This theme is taken up in Psalms 103–106, which summarize God's dealings with his people before any kings reigned. In between there is a group of psalms (93–100) characterized by the refrain "The LORD reigns." This truth refutes the doubts of Psalm 89.
- **Book 5** \_\_\_\_\_ **Psalms 107–150**
  - The structure of Book 5 reflects the closing petition of Book 4 in 106:47. It declares that God does answer prayer (107) and concludes with five Hallelujah psalms (146–150). In between there are several psalms affirming the validity of the promises to David (110; 132; 144), two collections of Davidic psalms (108–110; 138–145); the longest psalm, celebrating the value of God's law (119); and 15 psalms of ascent for use by pilgrims to Jerusalem (120–134).

### What should you read for the next lesson?

- (12/11):
- **The Hallelujah Psalms** {Psalms 104, 105, 106, 111, 112, 113, 135, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150}
- Read from as many as you can but the two we will focus on are **104 and 147**.

## Lesson 2 | The Hallelujah Psalms

{Psalms 104, 105, 106, 111, 112, 113, 135, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150}

**Praise the Lord. Praise the LORD, O my soul! I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to the LORD while I have my being** (Psalm 146:1-2).

The titles “Psalms” and “Psalter” come from the Septuagint (the pre-Christian Greek translation of the OT), where they originally referred to stringed instruments (such as harp, lyre and lute), then to songs sung with their accompaniment. The traditional Hebrew title is *tehillim* (meaning “praises”), even though many of the psalms are *tephillot* (meaning “prayers”). In fact, one of the collections included in the book is titled “the prayers of David son of Jesse” ([72:20](#)).

We have grouped Psalms in this workbook into our own subsets and most students of the Psalter acknowledge that there are two basic genres (or types) in the collection: 1) Hymns and 2) Laments – with each having a subgroup for the individual and the community or group of worshippers. Emotionally, these two types span the expanse human heart – from sorrow to exuberant joy.

The first group that we have called “Hallelujah Psalms” comes from a larger group of praise psalms that can be subdivided into two: **Descriptive praise** (praising God through descriptions of the majority of creation, the magnificence of His attributes or the power of God’s mighty acts in history) and **Declarative Praise** (Psalms that focus on God’s work of deliverance or provision called also, thanksgiving psalms) (Wilson, Jeff, *Studies in the Psalms*, Dan Petty, ed., 50). So, it is with the first group that we begin with the Hallelujah Psalms.

Hallelujah means “Praise Yah”, frequently rendered “Praise the LORD,” and it stands at the beginning of ten of these psalms (106,111-113,135,146-150) and sometimes at the end (104:35; 106:48, et.al.) and sometimes at the beginning and the end (106, 113, 135, and 146 through 150); That is why they are called, “hallelujah psalms.” From its frequent occurrence it grew into a formula of praise. The Greek form of the word (alleluia) is found also in the New Testament (Revelation 19:1, 3, 4, 6).

Psalm 117 is the best example of the structure for these psalms or praise because of its brevity and simplicity:

- The **Call** to Praise: *Praise the Lord* (v.1)
- The **Reason**: “*For.....*” (v.2a)
- The **Restatement/Call**: *Praise the Lord* (v.2b)

### FEATURED | PSALM 104

1. Theme: LORD OF ALL CREATION.
  - a. “The Psalm gives an interpretation to the many voices of nature, and sings sweetly both of creation and providence. The poem contains a complete cosmos: sea and land, cloud and sunlight, plant and animal, light and darkness, life and death, are all proved to be expressive of the presence of the Lord.” (Charles Spurgeon)
2. The Author:
  - a. “This Psalm has no title either in the Hebrew or Chaldee; but it is attributed to David by the Vulgate, Septuagint, Ethiopic, Arabic, and Syriac.” (Adam Clarke).
3. This Psalm seems to reflect, to a limited degree, Genesis 1.
  - Day 1, Gen. 1:1, the heavens - Ps. 104:1-4
  - Days 2-3, Gen. 1:6-9, land - Ps. 104:5-9
  - Day 3, Gen. 1:10-17, food and water - Ps. 104:13-17
  - Day 4, Gen. 1:14-19, sun and moon - Ps. 104:19-23
  - Day 5, Gen. 1:20-23, birds and fish - Ps. 104:24-26
  - Day 6, Gen. 1:24-26, animals and humans - (see C. above)
  - Day 6, Gen. 1:29-31, God's care - Ps. 104:27-30

- Day 7, Gen. 2:1-3, the seventh day of gladness - Ps. 104:31-34
  - After the Fall, Genesis 3ff, let God's judgment come - Ps. 104:35
4. An Outline:
    - a. The glory of God's creation in light, angels, earth, and waters. (1-2)
    - b. The supreme might of God seen in creation. (3-4)
    - c. The power of God evident at the flood and its aftermath. (5-9)
    - d. What God did with the waters of the earth. (10-13)
    - e. God's wonderful world of nature. (14-18)
    - f. The sun and moon bless the world God created. (19-23)
    - g. The wonder of the sea God created. (24-26)
    - h. The reliance of Creation in God. (27-30)
    - i. Blessing the God of all creation. (31-32)
    - j. A determination to praise God in song and in meditation. (33-35)
  5. Creation is a wonderful subject for sweet meditation, but we have even greater subjects. "Redemption is a choicer theme for meditation than creation is, for its wonders are far greater." (Spurgeon)
  6. "This is the first occurrence of hallelujah in the Psalter, and it is significant that it is joined to a prayer for the destruction of the wicked, just as it is in Revelation 19." (Boice)

### FEATURED | PSALM 147

1. Theme: PRAISING GOD OF CARE AND CREATION
2. Author: Unknown
3. An Outline:
  - a. Praising God for His protection and preservation. (1)
    - i. "There is no heaven, either in this world, or the world to come, for people who do not praise God. If you do not enter into the spirit and worship of heaven, how should the spirit and joy of heaven enter into you?" (Puslford, cited in Spurgeon)
    - ii. Psalm 33:1 says, praise from the upright is beautiful. True praise is beautiful to God, to His people, and to the individual Without praise or thanksgiving, an man is an ugly spectacle of what never to become.
  - b. The care and power of God. (2-6)
    - i. He heals the brokenhearted
      1. God does not only care for communities, but also for individuals. Those who hurt – the brokenhearted and the wounded – are special objects of His care.
      2. "Hearts are broken through disappointment. Hearts are broken through bereavement. Hearts are broken in ten thousand ways, for this is a heart-breaking world; and Christ is good at healing all manner of heart- breaks" (Spurgeon).
      3. "It turns upside down the familiar argument that in so great a universe our small affairs are too minute to notice." (Kidner)
  - c. Praising God for His work in nature. (7-9)
  - d. Making us the delight of the LORD. (10-18)
  - e. The presence and goodness of God's word to Israel. (19-20)
    - i. "The psalmist is not rejoicing that other nations have not received these, but that Israel has. Its privilege is its responsibility. It has received them that it may obey them, and then that it may make them known." (Maclaren)

### What should you read for the next lesson? (12/18):

**The Thanksgiving Psalms** { individual: 30, 34, 40, 52, 66, 92, **116**, 138; Communal: **65**, 67, 107, 113, 118, 124  
Read from as many as you can but the two we will focus on are **116 and 65**.

## Lesson 3 | The Lament Psalms

There are Community Laments (12, 44, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 89\*, 90, 94, 123, 126, 129) and Individual Laments (3, 4, 5, 7, 9-10, 13, 14, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27\*, 28, 31, 36\*, 39, 40:12-17, 41, **42-43**, 52\*, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 64, 70, 71, 77, 86, 89\*, 120, 139, 141, 142). There are also these specialized Lament Psalms that are Penitential, (6, 32\*, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143) and Imprecatory (35, 69, 83, 88, 109, 137, 140). \*are psalms that are hard to categorize.

“Be gracious to me, O God, for man tramples on me...” (Psalm 56:1).

Lament psalms are the most numerous. These psalms are a cry to God from distress, pain or sorrow, either from the individual (13, 22) or the community (74). Often they begin with the question "Why?" and end in an affirmation of faith in God from the midst of the pain.

The function of a Lament was to provide **a conduit within worship** to move the worshipper from lament to praise. The psalm provides a form structure that helps the heart in crisis, hurt, grief, or despair to move to joy and praise; from darkness to light; from desperation to hope. This channel from hurt to joy is not simply psychological or ceremonial and it is not a physical deliverance from the crisis even though it is anticipated. The Lament moves the worshipper "out of the depths" of sorrow and hurt to the "heights of joy" through what it truly a spiritual journey.

Be reminded that the laments do not take place in *real time*. Before writing, the psalmists have gone through a journey of wrestling with their thoughts and emotions, of crying out to God over and over, and of reminding themselves of the truth. And in so doing, they respond in trust and praise God: "I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever" (Ps. 86:12).

Since Laments are the most emotionally charged of the psalms, they offer varied compositions to deal with the range of crises they address. Yet at the same time they also follow most closely the basic elements found in most lament psalms. This relative stability of structure provides a framework within which to express the deepest of human emotion.

This is a typical structure and form of a lament:

1. Address to God, Invocation
  - a. first person address to God (I, you)
  - b. an initial plea
2. Complaint to God
  - a. description of problem, questions asked of God
  - b. crisis of any kind; in penitential psalms it is sin
  - c. claim of innocence
  - d. often includes an initial plea for help
  - e. condemnation of "wicked" or "enemy"
3. Affirmation of Trust
  - a. "But as for me" or "Nevertheless"
  - b. turning point of the psalm; theological focus
4. Petition
  - a. plea for God's intervention
  - b. often uses the words "save" or "deliver"
5. Acknowledgment of Response
  - a. assurance of hearing
  - b. vow of praise, worship
6. Doxology: blessings, praise

Laments are also structured for the Individual or the Community. Some laments were written for the king to pray on behalf on the community or nation. There is little difference between individual and community laments, especially since the same metaphors occur in both, the structure is similar, and the same conclusions are expressed in both. Individual laments are written from the perspective of one person, using first person pronouns rather than second person (communal lament). Individual laments, more present than communal laments in Psalms, may have been kept for home use rather than in corporate settings. Perhaps the most significant difference is how the event causing the lament has impacted the writer.

A lament arises from an immediate crisis or emotional state that faces the worshipper. This can range from physical threat either externally (an invading army) or internally (physical illness), to interpersonal conflict with others in the community, to betrayal or injustices perpetrated by friends or family. All of these can be referred to metaphorically as "the enemy" or "foes," even when the crisis is physical illness. This becomes a stereotypical way of describing any crisis that threatens or diminishes the vitality of life. In this same vein, "death" is a frequent metaphor for this crisis, whether or not the crisis is physically life threatening.

**The significance of a lament** is that it expresses a trust in God in the absence of any evidence that He is active in the world. Through a sequential and deliberate structure, the lament moves from articulation of the emotion of the crisis, to petition for God to intervene, to an affirmation of trust in God even though there has been no immediate deliverance from the crisis (see the Sermon on Psalm 22).

But not all laments are complaints. There are two specialized types of lament psalms that deserve particular attention, Penitential Psalms and Imprecatory Psalms that we will address in lesson nine.

- There are seven psalms that the church has traditionally understood as Penitential Psalms, prayers specifically for forgiveness from sins committed (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143; see also Jer. 14:1-10). While there is contact in some psalms with the idea that sickness or tragedy is the result of sin in the life of a person or the community, most laments do not approach the crisis from the perspective of sin. Instead, they appeal to God as protector of the weak and defender of the oppressed, drawing on traditional understandings of God. However, in these seven psalms moral or covenantal failure is at the heart of the lament. The prayer is specifically for forgiveness for that failure, even when the immediate problem is some other crisis. While there may be petition for deliverance from those other problems, the forgiveness of sin is at the heart of the prayer.
- The Imprecatory Psalms or Cursing Psalms are a much more radical version of the lament. In this handful of psalms, there are curses pronounced on those who have caused the crisis. Sometimes these are people within the community who have committed injustice, and sometimes people outside who, like the Babylonians, have invaded the country and brought destruction on the nations (Psa 137). While these psalms are not positive and pious, like all laments they are honest expressions of pain in the face of grief and endings. We should not attempt to "Christianize" these psalms by pretending they are something they are not. Yet neither can we exclude them as "sub-Christian." Rather, we need to take them seriously as a valid biblical response to God in prayer from the depths of our humanity. Since we accept these psalms as Scripture for the church, we need to allow them to inform our theology rather than using our theology to change the psalms.

**What should you read for the next lesson? (12/25):**

**The Thanksgiving Psalms** { individual: 30, 34, 40, 52, 66, 92, **116**, 138; Communal: **65**, 67, 107, 113, 118, 124  
Read from as many as you can but the two we will focus on are **116 and 65**.

## Lesson 4 | The Thanksgiving Psalms

(Community) 65\*, 67\*, 75, 107, 124, 136\*; (Individual) 18, 21, 30, 32\*, 34, 40:1-11, 66:13-20, 92, 108\*, 116, 118, 138

**“O give Thanks to the Lord for He is good...”** (Psalm 107:1).

As we have noted, John Calvin described the Psalter as, ““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.” (*Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 32). The Psalter was a picture book to express biblical faith for a people who had no copies of the Scriptures in their homes and could not have read them.

So when we come to this grouping of psalms, it is axiomatic that they would have been in the Psalter. Thanksgiving is more common in the psalms than anywhere else in Scripture. There are more than twenty psalms that command, or invite, Israel to sing songs of thanksgiving. "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good" is a common refrain (107:1; 118:1; 136:1).

The function of a Thanksgiving psalm is to praise God for something He has done for the Psalmist, to offer thanksgiving in the form of worship. In thanksgiving psalms, there are three main aspects: 1) praise for a deed God has done or an experience of God by the Psalmist; 2) an immediate response evoked by God’s action; 3) and a joyful tone. This is not a *general attitude* of thankfulness in most cases, but an outpouring of an emotional celebration based on some immediate experience of God’s goodness and grace.

Some psalms specify a reason, linking thanksgiving with God’s acts of love and worship, exhorting worshipers to glorify God with thanksgiving (69:30), come before him with thanksgiving (95:2), enter his gates with thanksgiving (100:4), sing to the Lord with thanksgiving (147:7). Perhaps surprisingly, many cries for aid and laments conclude with thanksgiving (individual cries for help in 7:17; 28:7; 35:18; 52:9; 54:6; 86:12; communal cries in 79:13; 106:47).

**Thanksgiving should be the next step after lament.** In lament, petitions are brought to God with an affirmation that he will act. *The thanksgiving prayer is the response to God’s actions*, acknowledging that he has heard the petition and answered in some way that has been experienced by the worshipper. However, the word for thanks is *todah* that is characteristic of these psalms in Hebrew is not directly equivalent to "thanks," even though it is usually translated that way. In some sense the term "thanksgiving" is more an adaptation to English that it is an accurate description of this type of Psalm.

The sequence of lament-*todah* is not "please-thank you," but petition-praise. "Thanks" is only one aspect of the praise of *todah* and is a way to give content to the praise. But the real impact of these Psalms is that God is acknowledged as the source of all goodness in life. *Todah* is really a kind of praise offered to God that arises out of personal or community experience in their commitment to God, usually seen in the middle section of the psalm as the worshipper recounts his experience. This fact places this "thanksgiving" firmly in community worship as a visible sign of praise to God for his grace.

There are also two specialized types of *todah* psalms that deserve special attention.

- *Salvation History* psalms, as they are described, retell the story of God’s creation of the people of Israel, usually in an abbreviated version of the exodus story, concluding with praise to God for his deliverance, or calling the people to respond in praise and faithfulness to God’s grace. Because these also call for praise, they are very close to Hallelujah, or praise hymns.
- *Songs of Trust* are also *todah* psalms that look even more to a hymn of praise. There is still a sense of an experience with God that brings praise. They are experience generalized to trust.

Thanksgiving psalms are calls to celebrate in Yahweh's answering of complaints and his deliverance of petitioners. The Psalter contains both individual and communal psalms as well that exhibit some or all of the

following structural components:

1. Summary of the Testimony of the Psalmist
  - a. recalls plea for help
  - b. recounts God's intervention
2. Narration of the Psalmist's experience
  - a. the original problem
  - b. the cry for help
  - c. God's deliverance
3. Acknowledgement of God's aid in Praise/Thanks
  - a. worship, with the word todah: praise, sacrifice, blessings
  - b. cry of praise

Typically, in the summary of the Psalmist, the thanksgiving psalm begins with a declaration of praise or thanksgiving to Yahweh and a short reference to what it is that he has accomplished (18:1-3; 30:1-3; 65:1-2; 107:1-3; 116:1-2; 118:1-4; 138:1-2).

Then, the Psalmist narrates or details, though often in some figurative imagery, the experience that surrounds those circumstances of God's delivery that deserve gratitude (18:4-5 ; 30:6-7 ; 32:3-4 ; 65:3a ; Psalms 107:4-5 Psalms 107:10-12 Psalms 107:17-18 Psalms 107:23-27 ; 116:3 ; 118:10-13 ; 124:1-5).

Last, the Psalmist acknowledges God's aid in his complaint with utterances of praise and thanksgiving to God and/or a call for others to join in worship of him (18:46 ; 30:12; 32:11; 40:3-5, 40:9-10; 107:8-9; 107:15-16; 107:21-22; 116:12-19; 118:19-29; 124:6a; 138:4-6).

Thanksgiving psalms provide worshippers today with reasons for thanks:

1. They serve to emphasize the fact that it is only right for worshipers to give thanks to God (7:17; 54:6; 92:1; 106:1; 107:1; 118:1; 118:29; 136:1).
2. Indeed, thanksgiving is expected of the faithful (30:4; 97:12).
3. They enter God's presence with it on their lips (95:2; 100:4; 118:19).
4. They proclaim it in the presence of others to publicize His goodness and thereby honor Him (9:1; 26:7; 50:23; 57:9; 75:1; 108:3; 109:30; 111:1).

**What should you read for the next lesson? (1/8):**

**The Historical Psalms or Psalms of Remembrance** {Psalms 44, 66, 78, 89, 105, 106, 107, 135, 136}  
Read from as many as you can but the two we will focus on are **105** and **136**.

## Lesson 5 | The Historical Psalms

or **Psalms of Remembrance** {Psalms 44, 66, 74, 77, 78, 89, **105**, 106, 107, 132, 135, **136**}

Read from as many as you can but the two we will focus on are **105** and **136**.

**“Listen, O my people, to my instruction... I will open my mouth [about] dark sayings of old which we have heard and known and our fathers have told us [and] we will not conceal them... but tell them to the generation to come” (78:1-4).**

When we describe Psalms as “Historical” or “Psalms of Remembrance,” it is not to say they were written to teach history or to simply be a musical remake of history. However, what it does mean in the Psalter is that the composers make reference to great redemptive acts of the past, particularly the Exodus – the defining event of Salvation throughout Scripture (Psalm 77:19-20) and the establishment of the Davidic dynasty through God’s covenant (Psalms 89, 132). The most common examples are found in Psalms 78, 105, 106, 135, 136. But in most cases, only a single event is ever cited in the songs we have grouped into this category.

Also, Psalms of remembrance speak of the “wonderful acts” of God (105:2) and focus the worshipper’s attention in these “larger than life” acts of redemption. And because of these events of history, not for the historical knowledge itself, the writer calls the worshipper to praise the God of Israel: “Give thanks to the Lord; call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done” (105:1).

Even in Psalm 136, the unique refrain, “For His steadfast love endures forever”, is repeated after the mention of different acts of God like creation (“to Him who by understanding made the heavens” v.4); the Exodus (“to Him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt” (v. 10); and overthrew kings (v. 17) like Sihon (v. 19), Og (v. 20).

So why would there be the repetition of these events in the worship, even the song and the prayers? Even Moses’s second sermon narrates the history of the nation (Deuteronomy 1-4) to establish who that generation was and to Whom they belonged (5:2-3). While families were told to share the law that Moses “commanded them that day” (6:6), they were also told to share with their children and grandchildren (4:9-10).

Some have catalogued more than twenty historical or national psalms. We list these in two general classes:

1. Those using a historical narrative of some part of Israel's history... such as Psalms 78, 105, 106, 135, 136
2. Those using a personal reflection or meditation that is based on a historical reality... such as Psalms 44, 66, 89, 107, etc.

We often say, “Those who do not learn from past history will surely repeat it in the future.” However, Judaism develops a linear concept of time as opposed to the cyclical one most cultures reflect and as they would go along, they would sanctify the event rather than the place. Time becomes for Judaism the realm in which humanity and God join to complete together the work of creation fully realized in the coming of Messiah.

Still, there was a the application of learning lessons from the past. So why do some of the Psalms pick up on ancient history and incorporate it into the hymns?

**To give remembrance:** *“That they should not forget the works of God... and not be like their fathers” (78:7-8).*

These accounts of Israel’s past so that God’s people will remember history, perhaps, is the most obvious reason of all. The retelling of past events reminds the reader what has happened previously to show the real, verifiable, historical events. Thus, the psalms at times reference Israel’s history so that God’s people will remember their history.

**To prevent disobedience:** *“That they should.... Keep His commandments” (78:7).* Another reason the Psalms contain much about Israel’s history is to prevent disobedience. Israel failed — often. They frequently disobeyed

Yahweh and heinously committed spiritual adultery. The Old Testament includes their complaints, disbelief, idolatry, sexual immorality, drunkenness, irreverence, false worship, pride and arrogance, foolishness, and lying — to name just a few. Thus, when the psalms speak of Israel's history, one such reason is to teach God's people to beware and exercise caution so as to not repeat the failures and sins of Israel in the past — just like Paul wrote (1Corinthians 10:1-13).

**To direct the next generation:** *“That they should teach them to their children”* (78:5,6). Repeated several times in Psalm 78 alone, many of the historical psalms remember Israel's past in order to teach the present or future generations ('a generation yet to be born,' v.6) about the works and Word of the LORD. This goes beyond the mere informational passing on of data. The retelling of past history to present and future generations is to compel them to put their confidence in God, not in themselves, not in idols, not in pleasures, nor in power. So much of Israel's history had served to visibly show Israel various ways that God had worked in her midst (e.g., the Feasts of Passover, Tabernacles, Day of Atonement). Thus, the relaying of the past should prompt the parents to present Israel's history to the next generation so as to instruct them walk in the ways of God and warn them to flee from the ways of sin.

**To worship God:** *“Give thanks to the God of Heaven”* (136:25). Remembering the past should cause a believer to worship! The God of creation is the same God of the Patriarchs. The God who loved Jacob is the same God who brought Israel out of Egypt by parting the Red Sea miraculously. This same God who led His people dwelt among them in the Tabernacle and remained faithful even when they sinned — incessantly. God does not change. He is faithful and cannot lie. What He did in the past should produce adoration in the worshiper's heart! Thus, when the psalmists remember the past works and ways of God (from creation, to Egypt, to the Exodus, to the Wilderness, to the Conquest, etc.), the proper response should be the oft-quoted refrain: His love endures forever!

For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. — Romans 15:4

**What should you read for the next lesson? (1/15): The Psalms of Confidence** *also called Trust Psalms* (Psalm 11; 16; 23; **27**; 62; 91; 121; 125; **131**). Read from as many as you can but the two we will focus on are **27** and **131**.

## Lesson 6 | The Psalms of Confidence

or Trust Psalms (Psalm 11; 16; 23; 27; 56; 62; 91; 121; 125; 131).

*“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. 2 I will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!” 3 For it is He who delivers you from the snare of the trapper and from the deadly pestilence. 4 He will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark.” (Psalm 91:1-4).*

So far we’ve examined the psalms of praise or Hallelujah hymns to God as Creator and Lord of History; psalms of laments – songs of suffering and which are also identified by their many questions to God and prayers in anticipation of God’s deliverance; and psalms of thanksgiving – expressions of answered prayer to God for his covenant faithfulness on behalf of his people. This section of psalms of confidence or trust psalms are characteristic of their demonstrative attitude of trust in the Lord. Since life was viewed as a pilgrimage for most Jews, the tough, challenging journey through the trials and hostilities of day-to-day living until the pilgrim meets God in His Presence (c.f. Psa 27:4). When the individual would sense his journey to trust, the singer would call on the covenant people to trust as a community in the sovereignly created by God for His own glory

Psalms of confidence are expressions of trust in God by his people as they encountered countless dangers and distresses of life. All of their troubles were submerged under their strong confidence in Yahweh. These psalms contain the elements of a **declaration of trust** in God; an **invitation** to trust him; the **basis** for such trust; a petition; and sometimes a **lament** where at last, they **vow to praise the Lord**. However, all of these elements are not always present in every song in this category nor do they always appear in the above stated order. The key idea in these psalms of confidence is that *Yahweh will protect His covenant people*.

Even the prophets pointed to a glorious prospect for Israel, calling them to trust Yahweh, despite the environment of hopelessness they often were in (e.g., Isa 41:15-16,18; Eze 37:1-14). Even David testified that in the midst of his present circumstances he could wait in patient, confident hope for the Lord’s deliverance (e.g., Psa 42:5,11; 43:5), regardless of what lay ahead (Psa 23:4,6). His confidence and assurance were such that he could pour out his heart to God, for he knew that the Lord was his unwavering foundation, his ROCK (translated “high ridge” in the NET Bible, Psa 42:9). The word serves as a name for God that symbolizes His unshakeable faithfulness, care, and provision.

In this regard, the psalmist points out that, having learned some of life’s lessons (Psa 131:1-2), he can encourage his fellow Israelites to “hope in the LORD now and forevermore!” (Psa 131:3). Or, “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God” (Psa 20:6-7). For “the Lord is our Light and our salvation – the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid” (Psa 27:1-2).

One of the most interesting psalms of trust is Psalm 56. Here the psalmist builds upon his opening plea for God’s acting on his behalf and his remarks concerning that which those who attack him are saying. He points out that: “When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. what can mortal man do to me?” (Ps. 56:3-4).

As believers today, we should trust with the same confidence: “Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. (Ps. 37:3). Believers should not only trust in the Lord but **delight themselves** in the Lord (vs. 4) and having done so “He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like a noon day sun” (Ps. 37:6). We should follow David’s further advice, “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him. (v.7).

We know that God is everything we need, but somehow the details of our lives still get in the way. We want to alleviate our troubles through other means—that vacation, the position that will bring recognition, or the spouse who will complete us. The psalmist says that anyone who places their desire in anything other than God will only increase in sorrow (Psa 16:4).

It seems radical and difficult to live out the psalmist's simple confession of trust in every circumstance but these are the choruses of these songs – trust the Lord, trust the Lord. Still today, however, the ancient practices of idol worship are regularly mimicked in our modern-day culture and sometimes, in the hearts of Christians. (Just look at the magazine rack or TV shows if you think I'm wrong: what is worshiped there?). Our culture is, and sometimes even Christians are, just like the Israelites—unfaithful and prone to “hurry after another god” (Psa 16:4).

For the psalmist, however, “Yahweh is the portion which is my share and my cup” (Psa 16:5). He is all the psalmist ever needs: “I have set Yahweh before me always. Because he is at my right hand I will not be shaken” (Psa 16:8). God brings the psalmist hope, and He can do the same for us.

He will be all to us – if we will just turn in trust to Him.

**What should you read for the next lesson? (1/22): The Wisdom and Didactic Psalms** (Psalm 1, 14, 19b, 39, 53, 58, **73**, 91, 112, 119, 127, 128, 133, 139 and the didactic, **37**, 49, 52, 119, 127). Read from as many as you can but the two we will focus on are **37** and **73**.

## Lesson 7 | The Wisdom and Didactic Psalms (1/22):

(Psalm 1, 14, 19b, 39, 53, 58, **73**, 91, 112, 119, 127, 128, 133, 139; and didactic, **37**, 49, 52, 119, 127).

In Wisdom literature, the writer is concerned with the application of truth (from creation and the Law) to daily life and choices of the hearers. Often, the application of truth was to give one skill in living [like craftsmanship (Ex. 31:1-11), building (1 Ki. 5:9-18), or handiwork (1 Ki. 7:14; Isa. 44:9-17)] or even good common sense (Job 32:7; Prov. 1:7).

This wisdom applies truth through generalizations or maxims. Examples in Proverbs, the book we often associate to wisdom, consists of pithy maxims to be applied properly to life (cf. Prov. 12:4; 11:2; 17:10). In Wisdom, there is this *proverbial wisdom*--short, pithy sayings which state rules for personal happiness and welfare but there is also, *contemplative wisdom* – which features monologues, dialogues, or essays which delve into basic problems of human existence such as meaning in life, or suffering [e.g., Ecclesiastes and Job].

And while the book of Psalms is still closer to poetry than to wisdom literature, there are aspects of Wisdom in these Psalms that were intended to be taught when they were sung. This collection expresses that one side of the heart of man towards God as he expresses fear, sorrow, despair, hope, praise, and skill at life (1, 27, 32, 34, 37, 49, 73, 112, 127--128, 133) with the objective on showing how to live happy, successful, godly lives.

So, in the wisdom psalms, the writer will teach the “*know how*” or the “*art*” of living. It is not merely “knowing good and evil” but knowing good *from* evil. There is doctrine or the teaching of God as the basis of these Psalms. And so, in Wisdom we will learn there is the power to see, and the inclination to choose, the best and highest goal, together with the certainty it will come. Wisdom is, in fact, the practical side of moral goodness. As such, it is found in its fulness only in God. So in these Psalms you will see the

- *Enunciation of general principles*: "Better the little that the righteous have than the wealth of many wicked" (37:16).
- *Praise God's law*: "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple" (Psalm 19:7).
- *Elevation of wisdom*: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding" (Psalm 111:10).

The fundamental question underlying Psalm 73 is, “How can a good God allow the righteous to suffer?” This question has puzzled saints and pleased skeptics over the centuries. This psalm and the question with which it deals is extremely important to us, both for the purpose of apologetics (defending our faith) and in order to preserve our faith in the midst of life's trials. Many Christians today seem to think that faith in God comes with a guarantee of freedom from adversity. In fact, too many of our evangelistic appeals are tainted with the false promise (implied or stated) that coming to faith in Christ will deliver men from their trials in life. When young Christians come to the realization that this is not so, their faith is sometimes severely shaken.

The suffering of the saints and the prosperity of the wicked is an issue which is frequently addressed in the Word of God. We find the Book of Job dealing explicitly with this matter. We come face-to-face with it again in Psalm 73. In each passage of Scripture the issue is considered from a slightly different perspective.<sup>116</sup> The unique contribution of Psalm 73 is that it deals with suffering not so much on the level of defending God as defining good.

**Psalm 73** addresses the problem of evil, as does Psalm 37 and others. However, psalm 73 is one of those psalms that ends on a happy note. In some of these psalms, the psalmist says he can only throw himself at God's mercy and trust Him because of His actions in the past (see, for example, Psalms 6, 13, 34, 44, 74, 79, 80, 89, 94). In Psalm 73, however, the psalmist reaches a resolution to his problem beforehand, which he expresses.

The question, “How can a good God allow the righteous to suffer?” reveals several fallacies in our thinking. The first is the assumption that suffering is always evil and therefore irreconcilable with God's goodness. The second is a failure to understand righteousness, so far as it relates to the saint, the true child of God. In answer to the problem of pain, this psalm forces us to take another look at our definition of good, lest we accuse God of being the author of evil by allowing us to suffer. This Psalm is a word of instruction to address the perplex question. It divides nearly evenly into two parts. Verses 1-15 depict the trial of the psalmist's faith when he observes the blessing of the wicked. Verses 16-28 describe the triumph of Asaph's faith, when he turns from protest to praise, from doubt to the declaration of the goodness of God.

The author is Asaph, the author of 12. Asaph is the chief “worship leader” who ministered before the ark of the Lord (1Chr 16:4-5). I can imagine that much of his agony came from looking out upon those who came to worship, knowing how hypocritical some must have been. Asaph’s dilemma is based upon this fundamental premise, believed by every faithful Israelite: God cares for His faithful but it seems like just the opposite was happening – it looked as though God was blessing the wicked, or worse yet, that the wicked were prospering and God didn’t seem to know or care! And he said, “But as for me, my feet almost slipped; my feet almost slid out from under me” (v2).

Asaph makes it clear that he has faltered by doubting God’s goodness and by envying the wicked due to their prosperity. The context of the entire psalm should make it clear to us that Asaph’s perception was far from accurate. Not everyone who was prosperous was wicked, nor were all the righteous poor and oppressed. **Neither has it ever been true that the wicked are entirely free from pain and suffering.** But Asaph wrote of what he saw. What made matters worse was that these same folks were arrogant about their sin, boasting about it (verse 8). They seemed to act and speak as though they were God. They were so arrogant that they even spoke against God (verse 9). They dared to think and to say that God must not know or care how they acted (verses 10-11). To sum it all up, as Asaph looked at the wicked, he envied their prosperity, and he began to doubt the fundamental premise that God rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked.

Asaph honestly confessed his sin and the dangers it posed for himself and others: “If I had publicized these thoughts, I would have betrayed your loyal followers (73:15). Yes, my spirit was bitter, and my insides felt sharp pain. I was ignorant and lacked insight; I was as senseless as an animal before you (73:21-22). The solution to Asaph’s quandary came when he went to the sanctuary of God and was able to see the wicked from a divine and eternal perspective: “Until I came onto the sanctuary of God; this I perceived their end. How they are destroyed in a moment! entered the precincts of God’s temple, and understood the destiny of the wicked.... How desolate they become in a mere moment! O Lord, when you awake, you will despise them (73:16-20).

So the wise application is the knowledge He teaches: “Who have I in heaven but Thee – besides Thee I desire nothing on earth” (73:25) so he knows that “the nearness of God is my good” (73:27). Do you see how Asaph’s thinking has radically changed? He began by complaining that the wicked were prospering and that he, as one of the righteous, was being punished. He believed that suffering is evil and that since God is good He cannot allow affliction to touch the life of the righteous. “Good” was somehow inseparably intertwined with material prosperity and physical well-being. But worship taught Asaph that the ultimate good in life is knowing God. If knowing God is the highest good in this life and in eternity, then we must conclude that whatever draws us away from Him is evil and whatever draws us to Him is good.

Closely connected to the Wisdom psalms, these **Didactic psalms** [37, 49, 52, 119, 127] are of a quieter mood, give advice concerning righteous conduct and speech, and caution against improper behavior and attitude. They aim to teach. Like Psalm 49: “Hear this, all you peoples; listen, all who live in this world, both low and high, rich and poor alike: My mouth will speak words of wisdom; the utterance from my heart will give understanding. I will turn my ear to a proverb; with the harp I will expound my riddle.” Some have suggested that the didactic psalms would have been directed to younger students while Wisdom psalms were directed at the older.

Often these psalms are “Acrostic” psalms which have formal patterns where the alphabet is in columns with first word in alphabetic sequence. Where you put 9 and 10 (together), 25, 34, 37, 111 and 112 (together), 119 (8 verses per letter). Even in the NASRB, the 37<sup>th</sup> Psalm is divided like Psalm 119 with an alpha based order of the alphabet – a technique in structure to make it easier to “remember” or “memorize.”

### **What should you read for the next lesson? (1/29): Royal and Messianic Psalms:**

Royal Psalms: **2, 20, 21, 23, 24, 29, 45, 47, 61, 63, 72, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 101, 110, 132**

Messianic Psalms: **2, 16, 22, 24, 45, 55, 69, 72, 87, 110, 116, 132**

We will focus on Psalm 2 and 110.

## Lesson 8 | Royal and Messianic Psalms (1/29):

(Royal Psalms: 2, 20, 21, 23, 24, 29, 45, 47, 61, 63, 72, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 101, **110**, 132; Messianic Psalms: 2, 16, 22, 24, 45, 55, 69, 72, 87, **110**, 116, 132; We will focus on Psalm 2 and 110).

Poet Robert Browning wrote, “God’s in his heaven--all’s right with the world.” Where in the world was he? As we look at reality, we have to question Browning. God is in heaven, but all is not right with the world!

Since the beginning of time, the world has known strife. The history of man is essentially the history of war. One of the earliest of all historical records, a Sumerian bas-relief from Babylon (ca. 3000 B.C.), shows soldiers fighting in close order, wearing helmets and carrying shields (James Boice, *The Last and Future World* [Zondervan], p. 98). There have been almost non-stop wars ever since.

In our century, World War I was supposed to be the war to end all wars. 20 million people died. Soon after, WWII claimed 60 million lives. The December 25, 1967, U. S. News & World Report wrote, “Since World War II [there have been] at least 12 limited wars in the world, 39 political assassinations, 48 personal revolts, 74 rebellions for independence, 162 social revolutions, either political, economical, racial, or religious” (the figures and quote are from Boice, p. 99). Obviously these figures would have to be revised significantly in 2020.

We too could croon, Why are the nations in an uproar, and instead of agreeing with Browning that “all is right with the world,” we would probably be more inclined to side with the guy who wrote this limerick:

God’s plan made a hopeful beginning,  
But man spoiled his chances by sinning,  
We trust that the story  
Will end in God’s glory,  
But at present the other side’s winning. (Boice, pp. 124-125.)

Israel’s desire for a glorious savior – the Davidic king who would deliver her from all her enemies and usher in a lasting period of victory and universal dominion – was shared in their culture through these songs. There is much in the way of regal material throughout the psalter.

And that’s why it is significant, before His ascension, Jesus told the disciples brought to their attention that “all things must needs be fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and the prophets, **and the psalms**, concerning Me” (Luke 24:44). From Genesis to Malachi, you can see a progression of the coming Savior, the Anointed, the Seed of David, the suffering Servant, the Prince of peace. As Jesus said, the Psalms also previewed his coming and his work.

So, it would be no surprise then to categorize Psalms as **Messianic psalms**. Another category, which would be viewed by me as a larger set of which Messianic and Enthronement Psalms are subsets: These are called Royal psalms. These psalms emphasize **the anointed King** after the line of David (Psalms 89; 132; cf. 2Samuel 7). Many of these point to the One King who will rule the world with a rod of iron (i.e. Messianic) and some are more interested in their present (Royal) and the events of the history (Enthronement). Historically, the texts refer to some high point in the monarch such as his coronation (Ps. 2), his wedding (45) or his going into battle (20; 144); his anticipated coming in conquest (110), and his glorious reign (Ps. 72). Many of these Psalms speak through David (the ideal king, cf, 2 Ki. 25:27-30) of the coming Messiah in a Messianic focus.

This view of grouping the Psalms is often attributed to Hermann Gunkel, who categorized ten psalm groups by their subject matter of kingship as **royal psalms** because of how they deal with the spiritual role of kings in the worship of Israel’s God, Yahweh. However, it has been suggested that his list is too small because some royal psalms, which do not mention the king directly, may have been written for royalty (e.g. Psalm 22).

**Enthronement Psalms** are songs of God's Kingship characterized by the expression "The Lord Reigns" (Psalms 93; 96-97; 99), the Lord is "the great King" (47; 95), or the Lord "comes to judge" (98). While these Psalms may have expressed aspects of God's reign at different times, they have their fullest sense in the coming Messianic kingdom (cf. Isa. 52:7)

However, what is the criteria for classifying a psalm as **Messianic**?

1. First, Jesus said there were Psalms that spoke *of Him* – not just David and not just the *LORD* (Lk. 24:44).
2. Second, specific psalms are designated as Messianic by inspired New Testament writers. That is, a "this is that" idea where the speaker applies the Psalm as fulfilled with Jesus in mind. Clearly, the Hebrews writer applied Psalm 110 to Jesus who alone could fulfill the role of priest after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:6; 7:17,21) just as he also applies the Son of Psalm 2 to Jesus (Hebrews 5:5). Even Peter quotes Psalm 110 as the explanation of what God had accomplished in Jesus as King (Acts 2:34-36) – as well as Psalm 16.
3. Third, these specific Psalms explain how the Jesus as the Christ (Messiah/King) should be viewed:
  - a. Christ's Nature: The name for deity is applied to Christ by the Father himself.
    - i. "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever" (Psa. 45:6-7; Heb. 1:8-9). Jesus is called the Son of God. "Thou art my son. This day have I begotten thee" (Psa. 2:7; Heb. 1:5).
  - b. Christ's Work: "I come to do thy will, O God" (Psa. 40:7-8; Heb. 10:7).
    - i. The roles of both king and priest would be an integral part in his work. "Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever" (Psa. 45:6-7; Heb. 1:8-9). David wrote, "The LORD said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." (Psa. 110:1-2; Mt. 22:43-44; Mk. 12:36; Lk. 20:42-43; Acts 2:34-35; 1 Cor. 15:25; Heb. 1:13; 10:12-13).
  - c. Christ's Sacrifice: "Thou art a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek" (Psa. 110:4; Heb. 5:6,10; 6:20; 7:17,21).
    - i. As noted above, Psalm 110 is the main text in exposition in Hebrews 5-7.
  - d. Christ's Rejection: "The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner" (Psa. 118:22-23; Mt. 21:42; Mk. 12:10-11; Lk. 20:17; Acts 4:11; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:7).
    - i. Even Jesus quoted from Psalm 41:9, saying: "I speak not of all of you: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, he that eats my bread lifts up his heel against me" (Jn. 13:18).
  - e. Christ's Suffering and Death: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Psa. 22:1; Mt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34). "Commit yourself unto Jehovah, let him deliver you" (Psa. 22:8; Mt. 27:43). "They pierced my hands and my feet" (Psa. 22:16; Jn. 20:25). "They part my garments among them" (Psa. 22:18; Mt. 27:35; Lk. 23:34; Jn. 19:24).
    - i.
  - f. Christ's Resurrection: "For thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol; neither wilt thou suffer thy holy one to see corruption" (Psa. 16:8-10).
    - i. Peter said, "David says of Him" (Acts 2:25).

The book of Psalms provides a chilling picture – and a rejuvenating one – that when the King God was bringing would reign – all would be right with the world. "Now therefore be wise, O you kings: Blessed are all they that take refuge in him" (Psa. 2:10-12).

## Lesson 9 | The Imprecatory Psalms (2/5):

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Read the following texts:

- Psalm 55:15 - Let death take my enemies by surprise; let them go down alive to the grave.
- Psalm 58:6 - O God, break the teeth in their mouths.
- Psalm 69:28 Let them be blotted out of the book of life, And not be written with the righteous.
- Psalm 109:9 - May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow.
- Psalm 137:9 - How blessed will be the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.

Does God ever hold accountable those who “gloat” over the misfortune of others? “Imprecatory” marks those psalms that invoke God to bring judgment, calamity, or even curses, upon those perceived to be the “enemies of God.”

Do these texts bother you? Do you find it difficult to reconcile the “harsh” language of this passage with others so brimming with love like John 3:16? Troubled souls often raise such questions: If all parts of the Bible are equally inspired, how do you explain passages like Psalms 69:22-28, which call for punishment upon one’s enemies?

Several explanations have been offered:

- Some writers believe these passages reflect a lower standard than Christ’s. They allege that this sub-Christian ethic was characteristic of Old Testament times, and that such texts were included in the ancient Scriptures because of “progressive revelation.” But this misunderstands progressive revelation. Gleason Archer: “Progressive revelation is not to be thought of as a progress from error to truth, but rather as a progress from the partial and obscured to the complete and clear” (1974, 460).
- Others claim that the composers of these psalms speak in the indicative mood (the “explanatory” mood) and not “imperative mood” (the mood of command/request). They merely were stating what would happen to the wicked; they were not actually asking God to destroy the wicked. But he often asks for future punishments.
- Still, another group advocate that these psalms are of a malicious, vindictive spirit, that one author has ventured to call “a pitiless hate, a refined and insatiable malignity.” (quoted in Charles Spurgeon’s Treasury of David on Psalm 109). But that cannot be consistent with “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

We need to remember:

- We must bear in mind that “every scripture is inspired of God” (2 Timothy 3:16).
- We must remember that any difficulty that exists in coming to an understanding of this issue is in our minds; the fault is not with the text itself.
- And also, we need to remember these believers are Jewish – and this cast light on the following:
  - Today, we do not have a Canaan God has given us to conquest. We should not pray to eradicate what the gospel has come to save.
  - Most of the Psalter is not like these and the vast majority is praise and thankfulness – even for them – and that should enhance what we know to do with these today.

If these prayers of malediction were intrinsically sinful, one would have a difficult time explaining the Lord’s “curse” upon Capernaum (Matthew 11:23-24), Paul’s prayer of “anathema” upon false teachers (Galatians 1:8-9), the apostle’s “denunciation” of Alexander the coppersmith (2 Timothy 4:14), as well as the prayer of those martyrs who, under the altar of God, *asked for vengeance* from the Lord (Revelation 6:10).

C. S. Lewis was correct when he wrote: “[T]he ferocious parts of the Psalms serve as a reminder that there is in the world such a thing as wickedness and that . . . is hateful to God” (1958, 33).

Jesus modeled pray in His sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:9-13). Many of the praises and petitions of the Psalms fit beautifully under the individual phrases of the Lord's model prayer. In fact, the petition, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," often, overlooked as merely introductory, is really pivotal and illustrative of where these imprecatory psalms come from. Christ teaches us to pray for the victory of God's kingdom. Can we believe that the model was merely to usher in the enthronement of Him as King on Pentecost when the Church was established? Or is what the writer of Hebrews (12:25-29) says to "see to it that you do not refuse Him.. since we receive an unshakeable kingdom" something about Pentecost or about their present? And that present that "God is a consuming fire" is that judgment belongs to Him. Is not Jesus asking that we pray for the complete overthrow of Satan's kingdom and all his followers? We must be candid enough to acknowledge that to pray for the extension of God's kingdom is to solicit the destruction of all other kingdoms. **This is the unique prayer life of the disciples of Christ.** When we pray as Jesus taught us, we cry out to God for His blessings upon His church and for His curses upon the kingdom of the evil one.

This is not a desire for personal revenge; rather, it is a comfort that the will of God shall prevail. May God help us to deepen our concern for the souls of people. Too, may we desire to see every wicked way abolished, so that people will be rescued from the destiny of the wicked.

Look at **Psalm 109**. In the first five verses (109:1-5) David humbly pleads with God to be delivered from his remorseless and false-hearted enemies. In 109:6-20, he is filled with a prophetic passion that carries him entirely beyond himself and denounces judgment on them. Then, in 109:21-31, he returns to his communion with God in prayer and praise. The central portion of the Psalm in which the difficulty lies must not be considered as *the personal wish* of the psalmist in cold blood, but as expressive of his prayer that God punish evildoers.

Look at **Psalm 83**. It begins with a vigorous cry for help: "O God, do not keep silent; be not quiet, O God, be not still." Then in 2-8, the adversary has "plot[ted] together" against God and His people, and the schemes of the wicked are disclosed. In 9-15, the psalmist prays vengeance (imprecations) against God's enemies. Finally, in 16-18, he shows the sacred purpose of all prayers of justice: "Cover their faces with shame so that men will seek your name, O Lord. May they ever be ashamed and dismayed; may they perish in disgrace."

How can this become your prayer for today? Are the forces of evil now fewer or more in number, power, or boldness than then? The whole world has announced its rebellion against God. Even the latest "scientific" technology is being used to mold and promote a godless society. And that's how these Psalmists see the enemies attack against God as an attack against His people: "Those who hate you... [conspire] together against your people, your treasured ones" (2-3).

So, do we say: "Do it again, Lord! Do that to *my own* enemy!?" Never! Never may God's people pray so out of a spirit of personal vengeance against *their* enemies. Do we need to be reminded again of our Commander's orders to love even our enemies? Further, we know the "hornet" of judgment these Psalmists often pray for their enemies – is for us – the Day of final judgment. And with that in mind, listen to what Paul says:

2 Thessalonians 1:6-10: "He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you" (1:6-10).

**What should you read for the next lesson?** (2/19) | The Hallel Psalms | Psalms 113-118

## Lesson 10 | The Hallel Psalms (2/19):

### Psalms 113-118 \_\_\_\_\_

Psalms 113 to 118 are called the HALLEL Psalms. Hallel (literally “praise”) is a collection of Psalms that are typically sung or chanted joyously, and the final verses (beginning from Psalms 118:21) are repeated twice.

These Psalms, while unknown if the Psalter’s collector intended them to be their own separate unit, have been purposed, by the uses the Jews made of it, as a unique book of Psalms for a specific purpose in their worship services (or, liturgy). They are essentially expressions of thanksgiving and joy for divine redemption.

These Hallel psalms are recited in two different ways: (a) The "full" Hallel, consisting of Psalms 113–118. It is chanted in the synagogue on Feast of Tabernacles (or, \*Sukkot), Festival of Lights (or, \*Hanukkah), the first day of \*Passover (the first two days in the Diaspora), Feast of Weeks (or, \*Shavu'Ot) and used today in many synagogues for other days of interest for National Israel, like Israel Independence Day.

But for our interests in this class, Hallel was also recited during the Passover memorial feast (or, \*seder service) and is also known as "Egyptian Hallel" (or, \*Hallel Mizri) because of the nation’s exodus from Egypt which the Divinely planned meal was intended to commemorate in every generation.

The second part, or the "half" Hallel, consisting of the "full" Hallel, excepting Psalms 115:1–11, and 116:1–11. It was recited in the synagogue on the \*New Moon and on the last six days of Passover.

In the context of the Passover celebration, Psalms 113 and 114 typically would have been sung before the Passover meal and Psalms 115-118 would have been sung afterward.

It is most likely these were the psalms that Jesus and his disciples sung after the Last Supper, a Passover meal, before their retirement to the Garden of Gethsemane and Jesus’ later arrest (Matthew 26:30). These psalms are designed not only to aid the Hebrews in their worship, but they were also designed to remind them of their dependence upon Yahweh who rescued them from slavery, which of course is fulfilled spiritually by Jesus’ atoning sacrifice.

Imagine the impact that these psalms must have had on visitors to Jerusalem during these festival times. You would have streams of people entering into the city singing praises to God for his wondrous works and inviting others to sing along with them. It was meant to be an exciting time—a time that might bring even outsiders to investigate the wonders of this mighty God and the promise of his marvelous Messiah.

Dr. Edersheim says that the Talmud dwells upon the peculiar suitability of the Hallel to the Passover, "since it not only recorded the goodness of God towards Israel, but especially their deliverance from Egypt, and therefore appropriately opened with Praise ye Jehovah, ye servants of Jehovah, -- and no longer servants of Pharaoh."

He also continued with, "The close following of the words, "Hallelujah, Hallelu, Hallelu," must have had a fine effect in the public services." The temple service was responsive and "Every first line of a Psalm was repeated by the people, while to each of the others they responded by a Hallelu Jah or Praise ye the Lord" thus --

- The Levites began: Hallelujah (Praise ye the Lord).
- The people repeated: Hallelu Jah.
- The Levites: Praise (Hallelu), O ye servants of Jehovah.
- The people responded: Hallelu Jah.
- The Levites: Praise (Hallelu) the name of Jehovah.
- The people responded: Hallelu Jah.

It is important to note that the lyrics were repetitive – but not viewed as empty and boring. In fact, it was in their repetitiveness that the worshiper was encouraged to lift his heart to praise.

The Jews have handed down the tradition, that this Psalm, and those that follow on to the 118th, were all sung at the Passover; and they are denominated "The Great Hallel." This tradition shows, at all events, that the ancient Jews perceived in these six psalms some link of close connection that they sang over and over again – even with its repetitions.

They all sing of God the Redeemer, in some aspect of his redeeming character; and this being so, while they suited the paschal feast, we can see how appropriate they would be in the lips of the Redeemer, in his Upper Room. Thus --

- In Psalm 113, he sang praise to him who redeems from the lowest depth.
- In Psalm 114, he sang praise to him who once redeemed Israel, and shall redeem Israel again.
- In Psalm 115, he uttered a song -- over earth's fallen idols -- to him who blesses Israel and the world.
- In Psalm 116, he sang his resurrection song of thanksgiving by anticipation.
- In Psalm 117, he led the song of praise for the great congregation.
- In Psalm 118 (just before leaving the Upper Room to go to Gethsemane), he poured forth the story of his suffering, conflict, triumph and glorification.

These repetitions show,

1. The importance of praise.
2. Our many obligations to render it.
3. Our backwardness in the duty.
4. The heartiness and frequency with which it should be rendered.
5. The need of calling upon others to join with us.

On comments on Psalm 116, Win Groseclose, in his book, The Egyptian Hallel Psalms, observes that the Hallel Psalms frequently appear in the early Christian and Reformer's hymns as well.

In this case, he finds a parallel with the hymn, *O For A Thousand Tongues to Sing*. Wesley's original edition had nineteen stanzas, just like Psalm 116 and with a similar theme—Thanksgiving.

"I have loved because Yahweh will hear; my prayer of supplication." (Ps 116:1, Groseclose's translation) and "I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy." (Ps 116:1 ESV). "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19 ESV) seems like a direct quote of Psalm 116:1

These six Psalms are a remarkable celebration of the great acts of the Lord in delivering His people from Egypt – and how much more they should be to us to remind us that the great Yahweh who rescued Israel has once again rescued us because they point forward to the deliverance that would come through the Savior of man, Jesus Christ.

**What should you read for the next lesson?** | (2/26) | The Shepherd Psalms (22-24)

## Lesson 11 | The Shepherd Psalms (2/26):

Psalms 22-24 \_\_\_\_\_

The diligent student will discover glimpses of Messiah throughout the Old Testament. Many of these require insight gained from the New Testament to be recognizable but still, a reasonable amount of study will enable most students to present Messiah using Old Testament passages exclusively since this is the way Messianic believers converted, and still convert, their Jewish brothers since Jews don't recognize the New Testament's authority as Scripture. Isaiah's Servant Songs from 42:1-9, 49:1-7, 50:4-9 and 52:13-53:12, actually present on one place as complete a picture of the Messiah as you'll find anywhere in Scripture.

Yet in the Psalms – of which some were Messianic – many extol God and the work He is (and will) do for Israel. Among those are a small collection of Psalms, along with others that are not Messianic, that we call Shepherd Psalms. These are often Psalms of Confidence.

*"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want"* are likely some of the most beloved words both read memorized among Christians I know.

Shepherding is one of the oldest occupations. So, it is not surprising that God would use the care of a shepherd and his relationship with his flock as a common metaphor in the ancient Near East for the leadership of people, especially kings, and His Own. The Bible likens civil and religious leaders as shepherds (e.g., 1 Kings 22:17), especially with David. So, his life as a shepherd even after he left the pasture must have continued to play a role in the way He wanted to picture God. Much of what he learned leading sheep he applied to those who were leaders of men. Famously, he appealed to his exploits in guarding the flock, how he depended upon God, to illustrate his ability to fight Goliath (1 Sam. 17:34–37). David knew the constant care needed to be a good shepherd and thus it provided a rich metaphor for God's constant care for him.

However, it was not unique to David to regard God as Shepherd. He is not the first to call God his shepherd. In Genesis 48:15, Israel says that "Yahweh has been my shepherd all my life." Solomon said that the wise words he shared came from One Shepherd (Ecclesiastes 12:11). Even the prophet Micah (7:14) called on Yahweh to "shepherd They people with Thy Scepter."

So then, when we speak of Shepherd's Psalms, we refer to that small collection from Scripture, sometimes called the Shepherd Psalm Trilogy (Psalms 22, 23, and 24), penned by David. These three Psalms have been suggested to show the three specific roles of the Messiah, as we know them today, cast in terms of the Shepherd's role and responsibilities: Psalm 22 is what He did in the past, Psalm 23 is the present and Psalm 24 is the future; Or explaining yet another way, Psalm 22 is the Savior's Cross, 23 is Shepherd's Crook and Psalm 24 is the King's Crown. Yet this emphasis is mostly associated with a premillennial outlook in that it looks to Psalm 24 being a picture of Messiah's reign (that is still) in our future. Yet, it is clear from Pentecost, the Apostles' *experienced* and *preached* the evidence of *His present reign* (in the Holy Spirit and in the words the Holy Spirit gave them, Acts 2). So, when we collect these together here, it is not to imagine that all three Psalms prophesy of Jesus *as Messiah*. Inasmuch as Jesus is the Good shepherd (John 10:11) and "lays down his life for the sheep," he is the One of Psalm 22 because He connected His suffering on the Cross by quoting it. There is no inspired connective fulfillments for Psalm 23 or 24 directly to Messiah.

Psalm 23 is not Messianic. One can connect the Good Shepherd (John 10:11) in the Psalm – not because it predicts Jesus as Shepherd – but merely because He will be like His Father who "cares for the sheep" and who has the same love as His Father (Hebrews 13:20-21).

Psalm 24 is a Royal Psalm because it heralds to welcome from Zion of the glorious King. Certainly Jesus is the Messiah – and the question is not where He is – but whether David saw only Him in this Psalm. The face

that this Psalm is nowhere connected in the New Testament to Jesus suggests it is not prophetic of Messiah – unless we suggest that Jesus is the perfect David and King – who alone can have clean hands and pure heart. Jesus is King now of His Kingdom (Colossians 1:13) but I do not believe He is the subject of this Psalm – instead it is the psalm of the King(s) God has placed on His throne and through who He reigns as the King of Glory.

That Jesus quoted from Psalm 22:1 on the cross IS significant because no passage predicts the suffering and death of Christ in the way Psalm 22 does: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Psa. 22:1; Mt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34). The antagonism and malice of the crowd is observed. “Commit yourself unto Jehovah, let him deliver you” (Psa. 22:8; Mt. 27:43). Details relating to his death were previewed. “They pierced my hands and my feet” (Psa. 22:16; Jn. 20:25). “They part my garments among them” (Psa. 22:18; Mt. 27:35; Lk. 23:34; Jn. 19:24).

But back to Psalm 23, Trying to imagine David’s life as a shepherd is not easy for most of us, since we live in a modern, urban world. The ancient world was in many ways simpler than our busy lives – and so is Shepherding. But it was far from mundane. To this day, caring for animals always presents unique difficulties, especially with needy sheep, besides the challenges of the environment. We could summarize the life of a shepherd as one of constant care.

David **needed to provide food and water for his sheep**—not an easy task for a shepherd boy from Bethlehem. The Bible describes Canaan as a good land, a land of blessing for God’s people, but it was not overly lush. Also, the best lands, areas that received the most rainfall, were reserved for agriculture. Shepherds roamed the hills and valleys in more remote and often rugged regions with marginal rainfall. There would have been times of abundance, but as we think about David as a shepherd boy, we should not envision the continuous green meadows of Ohio.

To provide for his flocks, David needed to be a **good guide**, since the life of a shepherd involved a lot of walking. Each day, a shepherd would bring his flocks from the safety of the village and wander through the hills and valleys in order to provide enough grass for them to eat. During this daily routine, a good shepherd would need to be aware of the needs of the flock as a whole and the needs of each sheep individually.

David also needed to be a **guardian of his flock**. Bedouin shepherds do not face the same threats from wild animals that David did. There are still wolves and a few leopards in Israel, but the lions and bears that David knew are gone. Sheep and goats are easy prey, and thus shepherds must be vigilant protectors, sometimes endangering their own lives. Even if a shepherd is able to drive off these dangerous predators, the flock will most likely scatter and need to be gathered, often from various nooks and crannies. Dogs were used to help guard the flocks against wild animals and are mentioned a few times in the Bible (Job 30:1; Isa. 56:11) but never as a companion of David.

All of these elements show how close of a bond there was between a shepherd and his sheep. He was their constant companion and would need to know them individually and intimately to properly care for them. The sheep would learn to trust their shepherd, follow his leading, and listen to his voice. David knew the constant care needed to be a good shepherd and thus it provided to him – and to us – the beautifully rich metaphor for God’s constant care for him.