

Listening to Jesus in the Psalms

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The primary English Translation of the Bible used in this study is the *Revised Standard Version*, Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1946-1952, 1971. The digital version of the RSV is published by Logos Research Systems, Inc.,

The *Revised Standard Version* of the Bible is an authorized revision of the American Standard Version, published in 1901, which was a revision of the King James Version, published in 1611.

Preface

First thoughts

The *Greek Septuagint title* for the spiritual treasure we know as the *Psalms* gives us an *insight into the spiritual power of their message*. The word *psalm* in the Septuagint, ψάλμος, *psalmós*, has a rich resonance derived from the early general community use of the Psalms. We note that all words, although their original *etymological meaning* is helpful, change their meaning over time and are defined by their use in a community, or in *cultural practice*.

Cultural practice refers to *the context in which the psalms are customarily used by a community, as in worship*.¹

For instance, take the meaning of the word ψάλμός, *psalmós*; a noun from *psállō* to *sing*, or *chant*. Originally it referred to a *touching* [with a finger], and then a *touching of the harp or other stringed instruments* with the finger, or with the *plectrum*. It later became used referring to the instrument itself, and eventually to *the song sung with musical accompaniment*.

However, in early Christian practice the meaning of *psalmós* *lost its musical instrument meaning* when its practice in the Jewish Synagogue and Christian assembly implied that *the musical instrument in singing was the heart of the devout singer*, not some musical instrument, Eph 5:19, “*be filled with the Spirit*,¹⁹ *addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, (singing, ἄδοντες from ἄδω, ádō), and making melody (ψάλλοντες, psallontes from ψάλλω, psállō) to the Lord with all your heart*. The Greek reads “λαλοῦντες ἑαυτοῖς [έν] ψαλμοῖς καὶ ὕμνοις καὶ ᾠδαῖς πνευματικαῖς, ἄδοντες καὶ ψάλλοντες τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμῶν τῷ κυρίῳ². *Ψάλλοντε τῇ καρδίᾳ*, with the noun *καρδία, kardía*, a noun in the *instrumental case*, implies that *the heart is the intended instrument to accompany the singing*, not some musical instrument, not a *kithara*, lyre, an ancient guitar, or some stringed instrument.

Zodhiates mentions that the use of ψάλμός, *psalmós*, and the various use of the lyre, *kithara*, occurred in everyday political and some religious local occasions. However, Zodhiates does not imply that the lyre is *inherently* implied as a religious expression when ψάλλω, *psállō*, or ἄδω, *ádō* were used to describe the singing.

However, “*singing and making melody in the heart*” in Eph 5:19, from “ἄδοντες καὶ ψάλλοντες, *singing and making melody τῇ καρδίᾳ*, clearly implies that **the heart**, in the *instrumental case* as in Eph 5:19, **is the instrument accompanying the singing**. The English word translated as *singing* here, ἄδοντες, is derived from ἄδω, *ádō* and not ψάλλω, *psállō*!

Furthermore, *psallontes*, from ψάλλω, is a *present active participle* referring the **act of making melody in the heart**, in which case **the heart is the instrument** that accompanies the singing, *adontes*.

To imply that since no musical instrument is mentioned in this expression, and that since there is no prohibition of a musical instrument accompanying the singing, that this opens the possibility for an instrument accompanying the singing. *This is a blatant, and possible intentional misreading of the text in the original language*.

The Greek explicitly *provides and specifies* the musical instrument that should accompany the singing, **the heart** which accompanies the singing, providing the spiritual melody to the singing.

The Greek meaning for the word *psalmós* in *customary usage* in the early years of its origin developed a deep spiritual meaning as a result of its practice in *community religious usage*. This introduced a spiritual dimension in the religious heritage of the Hebrews and Christians, and enriched

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Studies in Words*, Cambridge University Press, 1960.

² Nestle, Eberhard. and Aland, Barbara., Aland, K., Martini, C. M. and Metzger, B. M., *The Greek New Testament*, 27th ed., Eph 5:19, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993.

their spiritual worship. The *psalms* customarily in Judaism and Christianity thus found meaning in a deep spiritual context *by cultural community use*.

Although the Hebrew and Greek etymological meaning may have meant *a genre of songs, poems, or literature sung or chanted by people*. The word ψαλμός, *psalmós*, originally could refer to *any poetic literary genre* recited or sung *without* any religious meaning. However, the detailed *poetic style and parallel repetitive structure* of the psalmists Hebrews implied a *special category of esteemed literature*.

In customary usage in certain communities a *religious spiritual wisdom from God* became deeply imbedded in the practice of a community. *The power of the psalms thus lay in the context of the community's customary usage*.

The customary usage imbedded in Psalm 1, by its position as the head of the Hebrew and Greek corpus, introduced a spiritual tone for the psalmistry or psalter. The reciting, or “*chanting-singing*” of the psalms, conveyed a prayer and promise by hearing Jehovah in the psalms as *Yahweh*, the LORD, and meditating on his *Torah*, Law.

The Psalm commonly found in most canons of the psalms, Psalm 23, builds on the practice of *reciting* or “*chanting-singing*” the Psalms in praise of the LORD.

The dynamic of my approach to the Psalms

As a Christian, this study encourages the reader to listen to *Jesus in the Psalms!* After all, Jesus said he was *the good shepherd who knows his flock*, John 10:76-11.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not heed them. ⁹ I am the door; if anyone enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. ¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep ... ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd.”

Our New Testament understanding of *how* the LORD Jehovah speaks to us, even in the Psalms, is that as Jehovah, *Yahweh*, he *speaks to us through Jesus*.

In the context of David's and the Jewish understanding of the word LORD³, *Jehovah*, *Yahweh*, the Psalmist. David, encouraged his flock to seek for the LORD's presence in their lives, and to hear the LORD in the Psalms. As noted above, Psalm 23 has traditionally been an entrance for most people seeking to *hear the LORD, Jehovah, Yahweh*, “*speaking*” as *the shepherd who leads his sheep to still waters*.

³ In most English Bible Testament translations, notably Old Testament translations, the word for *Jehovah, Yahweh*, has been translated as LORD, all uppercase letters to differentiate from the Greek κύριος, *kúrios, Lord*.

“It can be very confusing to understand how the different titles used for God are used in the Bible. Part of the problem is that different Bible translations use the terms somewhat differently. The primary reason for the use of LORD in place of God's Hebrew name is to follow the tradition of the Israelites in not pronouncing or spelling out God's name. So, when God's Hebrew name "YHWH" is used in the Old Testament, English translations usually use "LORD" in all caps or small caps. Also, since ancient Hebrew did not use vowels in its written form, it is not entirely clear how God's name should be spelled or pronounced. It could be Yahweh, or Jehovah, or Yehowah, or something else.

As stated above, when "LORD" in all caps or small caps occurs in the Old Testament, it is a replacement for an occurrence of God's Hebrew name "YHWH," also known as the *Tetragrammaton*. This is fairly consistent throughout all the different English translations of the Bible. When "Lord" occurs in the Old Testament, referring to God, it is usually a rendering of "*Adonai*," a name/title of God that emphasizes His lordship. LORD/YHWH is by far the most consistent rendering throughout the different English Bible translations of YHWH.” *www. GotQuestions.org*.

The New Testament clarifies the point that the one LORD God, *Jehovah*, serves and reveals himself as three beings, God the *Father*, God the *Son*, and God the *Holy Spirit*. The LORD, YHWH, God, and Jesus form a unified *godhead* with the Holy Spirit functioning as “one in three” *Trinitarian lifegiving powers*. In the world of polytheistic religion the LORD God reveal himself as *one divine essence in three forms, functions, or beings*.

John made this remarkable statement when he introduced his Gospel and his understanding of Jesus. John 1:1-5, “*Jesus is God, **theos**, divinity.*”

*“¹ In the beginning was the Word, and **the Word was with God, and the Word was God.** ² He was in the beginning with God; ³ all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”*

My point in this brief discussion of *the divinity of God/Jesus*⁴ is that when we read the *Psalms* as *Holy Scripture* we should hear Jesus speaking to us as YHWH, *Jehovah*.

Furthermore, at his transfiguration with Moses and Elijah, two of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament, God speaks of Jesus as *his beloved son*, and instructed the disciples Peter, James, and John to **listen to Jesus** rather than to the great voices of their past! Matthew records this enigmatic experience for all disciples of Jesus:

*“And after six days Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain apart. ² And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light. ³ And **behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.** ⁴ And Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is well that we are here; if you wish, I will make three booths here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” ⁵ He was still speaking, when lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “**This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.**” ⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces, and were filled with awe. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” ⁸ And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.”*

Heb 1:1-3

This same theme is repeated at Hebrews 1:1-3, “*In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; ² **but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son**, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³ **He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power.**”*

So, transferring this theme of God speaking through Jesus when reading the *Psalms*, we should be in an alert spiritual attitude, poised to listen carefully to **the good shepherd, Jesus, speaking to us as YHWH!**

Personal study habits

I have to confess, most of the times I have read the *Psalms* I heard the Psalmist passing on *spiritual wisdom*! I expect this to be a common reaction, for the *Psalms* do fall under the category of *Wisdom Literature, Ketuvim!*

Along with most Jewish and Christian believers, I have long been aware of the rich spiritual blessings to be gained by a careful reading of Scripture, but especially of the *Psalms*, often referred to as *The Psalter* among the *orthodox Episcopal church tradition* for the *Book of Psalms*.⁵

⁴ For those interested in a deeper study of the Holy Spirit is an integral divine force in the divine godhead, Ian A. Fair, *The Biblical Theology of the Holy Spirit*, HCU Media, Amazon.com.

⁵ A psalter is a volume containing the Book of Psalms, often with other devotional material bound in as well, such as a liturgical calendar and a litany for the Saints. *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary*, Oxford University Press.

Beautiful words of praise and faith are evident in many of the Psalms which have a calming effect on souls through the ages seeking solace in times of personal spiritual need.

When believers have sought to bring depth to their worship of the Almighty, the Psalms have been a rich resource of liturgical enrichment and encouragement.

However, *like a good scholar surrounded by academia I have not been hearing Jesus speaking to me, but have heard David and the other psalmists, speak words of wisdom to me through their beautiful poetry and the text.*

The power of the Psalms is evident as we exegete and interpret the Psalms *as a vehicle of spiritual wisdom. After all, this is where the power of wisdom literature, and the Psalms, reside? **Spoken like a true academic rationalist!***

Most often as a biblical scholar I study to learn what the text says! *An excellent discipline and practice!* After all, as a professor of the Bible in a Christian university my responsibility was to encourage students to read and understand Scripture, correctly, and consequently to find how the theological message in the Psalms speaks to them.

But this is often done in a *prophetic* mindset, *telling myself and people how we should behave or react to stressful situations. A better approach would be to hear the priestly message God, or Jesus, is speaking to us, to me, personally, and how to react to Jesus speaking, and not just how the words of the Psalms speak as Wisdom Literature!*

Thankfully, and fortunately, stressful circumstance often force us to leave the academy behind and *sit in the Cathedral's pew of life's struggles*, hoping to hear a different voice speaking to us, *to hear Jesus not the psalmist!*

My next point in the exercise, drawn from *my own personal experience*, encourages one to experience the message of the Psalms, which message is moved out of the Scriptures and into some personal life struggles, *and to hear the wisdom of Jesus*, not simply the psalmist or the words of the psalm.

I remember well the spiritual and psychological help I sought and received some twenty years ago when I was going through a tough time with “friends” struggling with the direction their lives were going, and my inability to do anything about the circumstances, or to help them.

Although I had been a minister for over 40 years, and an elder in the church for about 10 years, and although I prayed nightly for my “friends” and their predicament, there was still *a vacuum in my psyche that needed help.*

I decided to begin reading a Psalm each night, to make notes in the margins of my Bible, and to pray over the message of the Psalm. I would not be exaggerating if I said that my *spiritual demeanor was enriched* every night. It was improving as I heard Jesus speaking to me!

My approach was to hear *the wisdom of God and Jesus speaking to me*, and simply to hear for me the personal inherent blessings of Jesus' voice, and his experience in the Psalms!

As a result of further reflection since then, I have realized that what I was doing was inviting the Holy Spirit into my life to do what Jesus and Paul had promised the Holy Spirit would do for the believer. The Spirit was *interceding with the Father and Jesus*, acting as my *paraclete and comforter, encouraging my soul, and strengthening my psyche!*

That was good theology, and Scriptural. I knew that and believed it, but unfortunately, imprecisely!

However, although it was imprecisely, the Holy Spirit was interceding with God for me, but this was more theological and spiritual than personal. Like most people; I have a tough time wrapping my arms around this Holy Spirit business⁶!

But then, we are encouraged to *live by faith and not by the wisdom of our imprecise intellectual humanity!*

However, I have recently been more able *to get my arms around Jesus*, for he lived among us and suffered many of the same issues of life we encounter where we live, and more so!

As mentioned above, while I struggled with the uncertainty of my predicament, and my “friends” predicament, I read the Psalms, prayed each night, and made penciled notes in my Bible.

I still have that same Revised Standard Version with its faded pencil notes. As I am writing this preface it is sitting on my desk here in my study, opened you know where, *the Psalms*, faded notes and all!

I have preached from those notes many times, taught many Bible classes on the rich theology of the *Psalter*, and treasure the months I spent twenty years ago listening to the Psalmists speak to me, through their inspired word, which I believed and still believe, strengthens me through the Psalmist’s shared wisdom, and the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Several thoughts pass through my mind as I think of the Psalms, but four texts stand out regarding reading the Psalms as *Law, Torah instruction*. These Psalms are spoken of positively as *Law*, or of *keeping the Law as a healthy spiritual exercise*.

The English word *Law*, appearing in these Psalms, is a “translation” of the Hebrew word *Torah* which in the Hebrew understanding is what Christians call the Old Testament. *Torah* originally referred to the first *five books* of the Old Testament, *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy*, which are commonly called the *Pentateuch*, the first *five books* of the Hebrew canon.

Eventually the word *Torah*, which in the Hebrew tradition means *teaching or instruction*, at first referred to only the Pentateuch, Genesis through Deuteronomy. Later *Torah* was “stretched” to include the other *sacred writings* which were progressively added to the Hebrew canon. This including the *Nevi'im*, the *Prophets*, and then the *Ketuvim*, the *Wisdom Literature* like Proverbs, the Psalms, and Song of Solomon, and Ecclesiastes.

The Hebrew canon includes 24 books, almost exactly the same books as the 39 books in the Christian canon of the Old Testament. They are gathered together in slightly different bundles; 5 *books of Moses* in the *Torah*, 8 *books of the prophets* in the *Navi'im*, and 11 *from the sacred writings* of the *Ketuvim*.

The general Jewish term for the 24/39 books of the Hebrew canon is seen in the acronym **Tanakh** derived from the first letters of *Torah, Navi'im, Ketuvim*.

Torah means *instruction*⁷ on *how to live a blessed righteous life before God*, enriched by His *Law* (the *Tanakh*) and the *Holy Spirit*.

Thus, in the Hebrew mindset *Law/Torah* conveys the sense of *instruction, guidance principles, statutes, and rules of acceptable behavior* before *YHWH*.

Psalm 19:7-10. “⁷ *The law of the LORD is perfect,*

⁶ I recommend you read my book on *The Biblical Theology of the Holy Spirit*, HCU Media, 2023. It might help you understand me and what I am now learning about the Holy Spirit!

⁷ The English word *Law* does not carry the rich meaning of the Hebrew word *torah* which stresses that Law involves *instruction from God on how those who believe in and follow Him should live*. Yes, there are *statutes*, commands, and warnings related to *transgressions*, but these are not simply related to the consequences of transgressions, they are *warning instructions* against transgressing God’s nature and principles.

reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure,
making wise the simple;
⁸ *the precepts of the LORD are right,*
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
⁹ *the fear of the LORD is clean,*
enduring forever;
the ordinances of the LORD are true,
and righteous altogether.
¹⁰ *More to be desired are they than gold,*
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.”

Psalm 119:33-40. “³³ ***Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes;***
and I will keep it to the end.
³⁴ ***Give me understanding, that I may keep thy law***
and observe it with my whole heart.
³⁵ ***Lead me in the path of thy commandments,***
for I delight in it.
³⁶ ***Incline my heart to thy testimonies,***
and not to gain!
³⁷ ***Turn my eyes from looking at vanities;***
and give me life in thy ways.
³⁸ ***Confirm to thy servant thy promise,***
which is for those who fear thee.
³⁹ ***Turn away the reproach which I dread;***
for thy ordinances are good.
⁴⁰ ***Behold, I long for thy precepts;***
in thy righteousness give me life!”

Devotional thoughts from this lesson.

First, the psalmists hold a reverence for the holiness, sovereignty, and superiority of God as the creator and father of creation, and define *Jesus as the servant Shepherd savior Son of God*.

This requires a *deep sense of reverence and awe* when reading the Psalms. An attitude of *deep spiritual meditation accompanied by prayer* is helpful in reaching the depths of this treasure-trove of spiritual wisdom.

Set time aside during the week to ponder the treasure of the Psalms.

Second, the Psalms often address a world of suffering, loneliness, and isolation. The psalmist feels alone in his world and environment and at times even feels *neglected or forsaken* by God. *However*, the genius and theology of the psalms is that *God or the Lord are always there to save and help*. The psalmists works out of a healthy and deep faith in God.

Third, the *Law* in the Psalms is always seen in a positive role as God’s *instruction to his people*. *Keeping the Law is associated with spiritual blessing and future eschatological redemption*. Psalm 1

encapsulates this theme and serves as a thematic introduction to the Psalms. Explain how Psalm 1 sets the tone for reflecting on the *Torah instruction* from God.

Fourth, Psalms, prayer, and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit are three sides of the *equilateral triangle* of *spiritual blessing and enrichment*.

Personal considerations aroused in this lesson

What point raised in this Lesson got your attention and how will this impact your life situation?

Who is speaking to you in the Psalms? **Not** who **was** speaking, **but** who **is** speaking to you? *What is he saying?*

What in this lesson encourages you to actively listen to Jesus *speaking to you* in the Psalms. How do you develop this listening style?

What experience with Matt 15:1-11 motivates this?

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Psalms

Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible

This Encyclopedia has been for me an enriching resource for exploring the *theological history* of this magnificent collection of liturgical and spiritual instruction we simply call *The Psalms*. In several places in this study I will reference the rich material surrounding the Psalms provided in this Encyclopedia and recommend it to the serious Bible student.

J. Limburg, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*

Limburg has this interesting comment to our normal approach to this amazing collection of deeply religious writings we call the Psalms.

“The English title “Psalms” is derived from the Greek *psalmoi*, “songs of praise,” by way of the Latin *Liber Psalmorum*, “book of psalms.” Among ancient Greek manuscripts of the OT, *psalmoi* appears in Codex Vaticanus as a title for the book. Codex Sinaiticus has no title, though “psalms of David” appears at the end. Codex Alexandrinus has as the title for the book *psalterion*, the name of a stringed instrument and the basis for the English “psalter;” *psalmoi* appears at the conclusion. The noun *psalmos* is found often in titles to the psalms, as in “psalm of David.” The noun comes from the Greek verb *psallo* meaning “sing (to the accompaniment of a harp)” (BAGD, 899), as in the references to David in 1 Sam 16:16, 17, 23 or to the minstrel in 2 Kgs 3:15.

The NT refers to the three-part division of the Hebrew Bible, speaking of “the law of Moses and the prophets and psalms” (Luke 24:44), with “psalms” representing the as-yet incomplete third division; note also reference to the “Book of Psalms” in Luke 20:42.

The oldest Hebrew manuscripts do not have a title for the collection as a whole. The note at the end of Book II, Ps 72:20, says, “The prayers [*tēpillôt*] of David, the son of Jesse, are ended,” thus designating the foregoing psalms as “prayers.” In rabbinic and later literature, the book is called *Sefer Tehillim*, “book of praises,” or simply *Tillim*. The noun *tēhillîm*, “praises,” is derived from the Hebrew root *hll*, “praise.” That root also appears in “hallelujah” (“praise Yah,” or “Yahweh”), found only in the Psalter, always at the beginning or ending of psalms (104:35; 106:1, 48; 113:1, 9; 146–50, beginning and end of each).

The noun “praise” occurs often in the psalms: “He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise (*tēhillâ*) to our God” (40:3; also 22:25; 33:1; 34:1; 48:10.). Psalm 145 is the only psalm to be designated a *tēhillâ* in the title, translated “Song of Praise.”

Of the 206 occurrences of *hll*, “praise,” in the OT (146 verbal, 60 nominal), about two-thirds are in the psalms or in phrases taken from the psalms (*THAT*, 493). *Because the collection of psalms contains so many expressions of praise to God, it became known as “praises” or “Tehillim.”*

The two names preserved in the Hebrew tradition, “prayers” (*tēpillôt*) and “songs of praise” (*tēhillîm*), may be taken as representing two fundamental types of psalms: prayers in time of need, or laments, and songs of praise, or hymns.”¹

Walter Brueggemann on the *Psalms*

“The book of Psalms provides the most reliable theological, pastoral, and liturgical resource given us in the biblical tradition. In season and out of season, generation after generation, faithful women and men turn to the Psalms as a most helpful resource for conversation with God about things that matter most.

¹ Limburg, J. “Psalms,” *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5, p. 523.

The Psalms are helpful because they are a genuinely dialogical literature that expresses both sides of the conversation of faith. On the one hand, as von Rad has seen, *Israel's faithful speech addressed to God is the substance of the Psalms*.

The Psalms do this so fully and so well because they articulate the entire gamut of Israel's speech to God, from profound praise to the utterance of unspeakable anger and doubt. On the other hand, as Luther understood so passionately, *the Psalms are not only addressed to God. They are a voice of the gospel, God's good word addressed to God's faithful people*. In this literature the community of faith has heard and continues to hear the sovereign speech of God, who meets the community in its depths of need and in its heights of celebration. The Psalms draw our entire life under the rule of God, where everything may be submitted to the God of the gospel ... There is a devotional tradition of piety that finds the Psalms acutely attuned to the needs and possibilities of profound faith.”²

For Brueggemann, the *Psalms* are Songs of *Torah*, they celebrate the glory of an Almighty God and reflect on appropriate or responsive instruction for the psalmist.

“When the creation is celebrated (in the Psalms), it is acknowledged to be a well-ordered world. That order depends solely on God's power, faithfulness, and graciousness. That is why, in the face of the creation, Israel can only yield in praise. But there is more to it. The good order of creation is concretely experienced in Israel as the *torah*. The *torah* is understood not simply as Israelite moral values, but as God's will and purpose, ordained in the very structure of life. While the creation is sustained by God's faithfulness, it is also coherent and peaceable because of Israel's obedient attention to the way God has ordered life.

Thus creation and *torah* are understood together, the *torah* articulating God's intention for Israel in the creation. That linking of creation and *torah* is particularly evident in Psalm 19, which consists of two parts: *verses 1-6 as a celebration of the joy and wonder of creation, and verses 7-14 as an affirmation of the life-giving power of the torah*.

To an outsider the themes may seem contradictory. Creation is about God's sure gift; *torah* is about the urgency of Israel's effort, as though the sure gift were conditional and not sure. *But for Israel, torah is Israel's way to respond to and fully honor God's well-oriented world*. That response in obedience is undertaken gladly in a posture of gratitude, without calculation or grudging.”³

Temper Longman III on the *Theology of the Psalms*

Longman does an excellent concise job introducing the theology of the psalms:

“What does the book of Psalms teach us about God and our relationship with him? C. S. Lewis once commented that ‘the Psalms are poems, and poems intended to be sung not doctrinal treatises, nor even sermons’ (Lewis 1961: 10). We may agree with Lewis, while also admitting that, though not ‘doctrinal treatises,’ the Psalms do teach doctrine. Indeed, as the fourth-century theologian Athanasius pointed out, the Psalms are ‘an epitome of the whole Scriptures.’ Basil, Bishop of Caesarea in the fourth century, noted that the Psalms were ‘a compendium of all theology.’ Martin Luther, the well-known Reformer of the sixteenth century, aptly called the Psalms ‘a little Bible, and the summary of the Old Testament’ (quoted by Anderson 1981: vi).

As we read the Psalms, we hear of God as Creator, Redeemer, Protector, Sustainer, Provider, Guide, and more. The predominant means of speaking about God in the Psalms is through metaphor and simile (see above). Thus, we hear that God is our Shepherd, our King, our Warrior, our mother, our Father, our Teacher, our Judge, and more. We will explore these facets of God's character and our relationship with him as we look at the various psalms.

² Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, p. 15.

³ Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, p. 38.

The psalms, as we will see, are a verbal portrait gallery of God, in that many of them provide us with a striking picture of God. While none of these pictures is complete in itself, and indeed all of them together do not give us a comprehensive picture of God, they do provide true glimpses of the nature of our God and our relationship with him. As Christian readers of the book, we must also address what Jesus tells his followers in Luke 24. This chapter describes what Jesus said and did during the brief period of time between the resurrection and ascension. He is upset that the disciples did not understand that he, as Messiah, had to suffer before he entered his glory.

After all, he reminded them, ‘This is what I told you while I was still with you: everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms’ (Luke 24:44; see also v. 27). While Psalms here stand for the entire third part of the Hebrew canon, the *Ketuvim* means Writings, Ketuvim, does include the book of Psalms itself.”⁴

The liturgical⁵ nature of the Psalms

Although there is no evidence, literary or archaeological, of a *formal* Temple worship service other than the Levitical rituals required for the numerous feasts and sacrifices offered in the Temple on special occasions, there is no Biblical reference to a formal liturgical occasion in which the Psalms are a featured in a formal liturgical worship.

For instance, the *Passover, Yom Kippur, Sukkot Tabernacles, Shavuot Pentecost*, are well attested in the “levitical” texts of the *torah*.

However, private family and communal worship services (Synagogue) were a common part of Jewish religious devotion, and there is ample evidence of a leading role the Psalms played in these services.

While there is *ample evidence* of the role the Psalms played in *family and Synagogal worship*, there is *no evidence* of a role the Psalms had in the *formal Temple feasts* and *sacrificial worship services*.

On special community occasions as in the Synagogue worship there is considerable evidence of the *singing of Psalms accompanied by instruments*, of a *formal choir with a cantor*, and of substantial evidence of musicological observations on these occasions.

Musical directions. As the Book of Psalms lies before us, its connection with the religious experience is apparent. Fifty-five psalms are addressed to the Choirmaster, and, as we have noted, in addition twenty-three are linked with the two main guilds of levitical singers, Asaph and Korah.

Musical instruments, such as stringed instruments (Ps 32:2) and flutes (Ps 5) accompany the singing of psalms in ancient Israel.

Other terms concerning musical directions are mentioned. *Selah* occurs 71 times. This may indicate a pause or crescendo; *Higgaion* (Ps 9:16) may recommend a meditative attitude; while seemingly obscure references like “*The Hind of the Dawn*” (Ps 22), “*Lilies*” (Pss 45; 80) and “*The Dove on Far-off Terebinths*” (Ps 56) may indicate the tunes to which the psalms were to be sung.

⁴ Longman III, Tremper, *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 47-48.

⁵ **Liturgy** is the customary public ritual of worship performed by a religious group. *Liturgy* can also be used to refer specifically to public worship by Christians. As a religious phenomenon, liturgy represents a communal response to and participation in the sacred through activities reflecting praise, thanksgiving, remembrance, supplication, or repentance. It forms a basis for establishing a relationship with God.

Technically speaking, liturgy forms a subset of ritual. The word *liturgy*, sometimes equated in English as "service", refers to a formal ritual enacted by those who understand themselves to be participating in an action with the divine.

Liturgical refers to the words, music, and actions used in ceremonies in some religions, especially Christianity. It is an adjective that describes *something that is related to formal public worship* or liturgies. Liturgy represents a communal response to and participation in the sacred through activities reflecting praise, thanksgiving, remembrance, supplication, or repentance. The liturgical year is a calendar that is in accordance with liturgy.

The precise meaning of other terms such as *Shiggaion* (Ps 7) or *Alamoth*, conjecturally a choir of ladies, Ps 46, may also be in the realm of musical directions.⁶

The 150 Psalms are attributed to several psalmists in the English Protestant Bibles

The Psalmists

The *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* observes that the nature of a proposed psalmist may be within the biblical text:

“The Hebrew Bible credits David with 73 psalms, compared with 84 in the Septuagint and 85 in the Latin Vulgate. Asaph and Korah, the leaders of the levitical singing groups, are connected with 12 and 11 psalms, respectively (although Ps 43 is almost certainly to be attributed to Korah also). Two psalms are ascribed to Solomon (72; 127), one to Moses (90), and one to Ethan (89), while Heman shares the credit for one psalm with the sons of Korah (88). The remainder are sometimes called “orphan psalms” because of their anonymity.”⁷

The Psalms as Devotional Wisdom Literature

The Psalms are widely classified by most Old Testament scholars as *wisdom* and *devotional* literature suitable for personal spiritual instruction and for devotional occasions as in personal devotions and community devotionals such as in the synagogue.

Useful comments by Robert Bratcher and William Rayburn

“*The Canonical*⁸ *Collection*. The complete collection of 150 psalms is divided into *five books*, each one of which ends with an appropriate doxology: Psalms 1–41 (41:13); 42–72 (72:18); 73–89 (89:52); 90–106 (106:48); 106–150 [Psalm 150 is the concluding doxology for the whole collection].

It is quite clear that the final collection was reached only after a lengthy process in which several smaller collections were brought together ... Two early collections were the psalms of Asaph (Psalms 73–83) and the psalms of the group of Korah (Psalms 42; 44–49). Another group was the “Songs of Ascents” (Psalms 120–124). Additional evidence of the process of compilation is furnished by the psalm which appears in two editions: as Psalm 14 it uses the proper name Yahweh (the Yahwistic version); as Psalm 53 it uses the generic name ‘elohim’ “God” (the Elohist version). Psalm 18 is to be found also in 2 Samuel 22:1–51; Psalm 70 is the same as Psalm 40:13–17; and Psalm 108 consists of Psalms 57:7–11 and 60:5–12.

Another example of editorial arrangement is to be found in the conclusion of Book Two, Psalm 72:20, “*This is the end of the prayers of David, son of Jesse,*” yet an additional 18 psalms are attributed to David.

Some manuscripts of the *Septuagint*, and some ancient versions, include Psalm 151, attributed to David which narrates his fight with the giant Goliath.”⁹

⁶ Elwell, “Psalms,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 2, pp. 1795–1796.

⁷ Elwell, “Psalms,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 2, p. 1794.

⁸ The concept of *canonical* implies that the Psalms are accepted by most Jewish and Christian groups as inspired, normative, instructional words of God. The *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* defines canon as follows: “The word “canon” comes from the Gk *kanōn*, “measuring stick.” By extension it came to mean “rule” or “standard,” a tool used for determining proper measurement. Consequently, the word has come to be used with reference to the corpus of scriptural writings that is *considered authoritative and standard for defining and determining “orthodox” religious beliefs and practices*. Books not considered authoritative and standard are often called “noncanonical” or “extracanonical.” Generally speaking, the corpus of authoritative books is called the “Bible,” although obviously the Christian Bible (or canon) differs from that of Judaism. This entry consists of two entries: one covering the canon of the Hebrew Bible (i.e., the Christian “Old Testament”), and another covering the specifically Christian writings comprising the “New Testament.”

⁹ Bratcher and Reyburn, *A Handbook on Psalms*, pp. xii – 2.

Dating the Psalms is challenging since several Psalms are found in various sources or places

The Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible

“Increasingly, modern scholarship accepts an early dating for the psalms. The study of psalmody in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and neighboring Canaan, as well as the realization that many poems embedded in the early books (e.g., Ex 15; Dt 32; 33; Jgs 5) predated David, increase the disposition to accept David’s traditional contribution to the music and poetry of Israel’s cultus.

In particular, the material from Canaanite Ugarit, where the structure and form of psalms connects with 120 of Israel’s psalms, is noteworthy ... but most of the psalms formed the hymn book of Israel in the period of the monarchy.”¹⁰

The theology of the Psalms

Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible

This valuable resource has an informative section discussing *the theology* of the Psalms.

“The Doctrine of God

In both adversity and prosperity the psalmists indicate a strong faith in God and a clear conception of his attributes. He is seen in personal relationships with individuals within the covenant community.

Understandably, anthropomorphisms (ascribing human characteristics to nonhuman things) abound, with references to God’s voice, words, ears, eyes, face, or hands and fingers. No exception needs to be taken to this. Anthropomorphisms of this kind are, in fact, widely used by 20th-century Christians. Their excellent value is that they make God real to the worshiper. How else could man describe God except in terms of his own understanding?

The only viable alternative is probably the vague mysticism of pantheism. Describing God’s interaction with man in terms of human categories ... involves no compulsion to accept that he is merely “glorified man.

The monotheism of the psalms emerges clearly in Psalms 115:3–8; 135:15–18; 139. God is viewed as the Creator (Pss 8:3; 89:11; 95:3–5), with references to the creation mythology of surrounding nations (e.g., Ps 89:10) serving merely as illustrations of his almighty creative power. He is proclaimed as the Lord of history (Pss 44; 78; 80; 81; 105; 106) and as the sovereign controller of nature (Pss 18:7; 19:1–6; 65:8–13; 105:26–42; 135:5–7).

The psalmists never tired of celebrating God’s absolute greatness, which nowhere appears as a barrier to the reality of fellowship which his worshipers might enjoy with him.

The Doctrine of Man

The Psalter is a “God-centered” book, but man has a worthy place, in spite of the vast gulf between him and his Creator (Pss 8:3, 4; 145:3, 4) and the limitation of his earthly life (Ps 90:9, 10). In the will of God he occupies a responsible, mediating position; creaturely, but with authority over all other created beings (Ps 8:5–8). The relationship with a righteous God is endangered by sin (Ps 106) but God is gracious and long-suffering (Ps 103), faithful and forgiving (Ps 130). While references to the sacrificial system are not lacking (Pss 20:3; 50:8, 9), the emphasis is upon a personal religion that demands obedience and a surrendered heart (Ps 40:6–8). Psalm 51 indicates a depth of sin with which the sacrificial system was inadequate to cope; the psalmist could only cast himself, in total penitence upon God’s mercy. Man’s moral obligations (Pss 15; 24:3–5) and loyalty

¹⁰ Elwell, “Psalms,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 2, p. 1795.

to the Law (Pss 19:7–11; 119) are fully accepted. Throughout, there is the revelation of a strong personal relationship which encourages prayer and praise and invites trust.

The Afterlife

The traditional Jewish Hebrew view was that Sheol is the abode of the departed, without distinction good or bad. Sheol was where all who have perished end up. This is clearly evidenced in the Psalms. The chief complaint of the devout man was that, in Sheol, all meaningful relationship with God ceased (Pss 6:5; 88:10–12). Increasingly, however, it was recognized that, since God was almighty, even Sheol was not exempt from his reach (Ps 139:8).

Added to this was the Jewish view of righteousness and the strength of fellowship with God which, faith decreed, *surely* could not be terminated even by death. Psalms 16:9–11; 49:15; 73:23–26 beautifully illustrate this tendency. The Psalter, therefore, witnesses to an important transitional phase in Israel’s belief, without reaching a developed doctrine of a personal resurrection.”¹¹

Characteristics of Hebrew Poetry

The Psalms as Hebrew poetry, like all poetry, depend on a variety of *literary styles* to make their point.

“Parallelism

“The most obvious feature of Hebrew poetry is that the unit is not a verse or a single line but a balanced couplet, with a short pause between the lines and a more definite v. 2, p 1798, p. 1798 pause at the end of each couplet. The main types of parallelism are:

- (1) *Synonymous*. Here the lines, repeating the same thought, reinforce one another (e.g., Pss 1:2, 5; 49:1; 61:1; 83:14).
- (2) *Antithetic*, where there is a contrast of some kind between the two lines (e.g., Pss 1:6; 37:9; 90:6).
- (3) *Synthetic*, where the second line completes or supplements the thought of the first (e.g., Ps 3:4).
- (4) *Climactic* or *stair-like parallelism*, where part of the first line is repeated, the thought then being carried forward an extra step. Sometimes a triplet, as an alternative to the couplet, utilizes this method (e.g., Ps 29:1, 2; cf. 96:7, 8).

Other types are sometimes listed, but most of these are merely variants of numbers 1–3.

Acrostic Poems

In these, each verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet (which contains 22 letters). Psalms 9; 10; 25; 34; 37; 111; 112; 145 employ this method, while Psalm 119 contains 22 eight-verse sections, every verse in each separate section beginning with the appropriate letter of the alphabet.

This method, in Western thought, had often been branded as artificial, but there is evidence to show that it was used to suggest the idea of completeness.

Moreover, poetry was a much more natural form of expression to the Ancient Near-eastern mindset, especially where emotion was involved, than to the average modern westerner.”¹²

There are several types of Psalms

[The Psalms are primarily *Tehillim* – Songs of Praise]¹³

We can identify *several distinct types* of Psalms on our Bibles:

¹¹ Elwell, “Psalms,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 2, pp. 1796–1797.

¹² Elwell, “Psalms,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 2, pp. 1797–1798.

¹³ This material is drawn from several sources on the Worldwide Internet. Indications of source are referenced in footnotes.

Torah Psalms—instruction

Torah Psalms: Psalm 1, 19, 119, 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128, 133.

The Hebrew word *torah* means *instruction*, hence, the Law defined a *torah* was intended to be *instruction from God on how to live a righteous life before God*. The next chapter on *Torah Psalms* will develop this point more fully.

The *Torah* and *Psalms* are both important in Jewish tradition. Here are some key points related to these *Torah Psalms*:

The *Torah* originally consisted of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, but later in the history of Israel *Torah* included the *Nevi'im* (the Prophets of Israel, *Isaiah, et al*), and the *Ketuvim* (the wisdom writings of Israel, *Proverbs, Song of Solomon, et al*).

Psalms 1, 19, and 119 are quintessential *Torah* psalms. Psalm 19 celebrates God's *torah*, while Psalm 119 *devotes 176 verses to the praise of torah*.¹⁴

Psalms of Trust, and Prayer, personal and community Psalms 23, 27, 34, 62, 63.

"Psalms of trust and confidence include Psalms 11, 16, 23, 27, 62, 63, 91, 121, 125, and 131. These Psalms repeatedly express confidence in their reliance on the Lord. Psalms of confidence include a lament, but the ideas of security, peace, joy, and confidence predominate"¹⁵.

Penitential Psalms

Psalms 32, 51, 61, 102, 130.

"The Penitential Psalms are a group of psalms that express individual lament and confession of sin. The Penitential Psalms are Psalms 6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129, and 142 (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143 in the Hebrew numbering)."¹⁶

Praise Psalms

Psalms 18, 100, 101.

"The book of Psalms contains 21 praise-type Psalms. Praise Psalms are usually subdivided into two types: Declarative-type Praise Psalms and Descriptive-type Praise Psalms. Examples of praise-type Psalms include Psalms 145, 146, 100, 34, 111, 95, 92, and 89. Hebrews 13:15 encourages believers to offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually."¹⁷

Lament Psalms

Psalm 13, Psalm 22, Psalm 42, Psalm 69, and Psalm 88.

"Lament psalms are psalms that express sorrow, grief, or despair before God. They are the most common type of psalm and can be individual or communal.

Lament psalms remind us that we are not alone in our suffering and that God hears, listens, and responds to our cries."¹⁸

For both the Jew and Christian Zion became a euphemism for the *City of David* from where YHWH reigned over Israel and Judah.

For the Christian, Zion became a euphemism for the seat of Jesus' reign over the Jewish Christians in the kingdom, then later his reign over the Gentile Christians.

¹⁴ *Torah* and Psalms - Bible Odyssey: <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/articles/torah-and-psalms/>

¹⁵ Psalms About Trust, <https://top-bibleverses.com/psalms-about-trust>

¹⁶ Penitential Psalms. <https://bibletalk.tv/penitentialpsalms>.

¹⁷ Praise Psalms. <https://bibletalk.tv/praise-psalm>.

¹⁸ The Art of Lament. <https://thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-art-of-lament>.

Wisdom Psalms

Psalms 1, 14, 37, 73, 91, 112, 119, and 128

“While it is accepted that prophets, priests, and wise men all functioned at the major sanctuaries, some overlap in their modes of expression is to be expected. Proverbial forms are not infrequently found in the psalms (Pss 37:5, 8, 16, 21, 22; 111:10; 127:1–5). Psalm 1, probably an introduction to the whole Psalter, contrasts the diverging paths of the righteous and ungodly (cf. Ps 112), while Psalms 127 and 128 concentrate on the blessings which attend the godly. Psalm 133 is written in praise of unity. The problem of explaining the sufferings of a righteous man and the apparent prosperity of evil men, dealt with in the wisdom literature in the Book of Job and in the prophets also (e.g., Jer 12:1–4), is taken up in Psalms 37; 49, and 73. The divine perspective, which a man may share in the sanctuary, and the preciousness of the fellowship which the godly enjoy with God, outweighing all other considerations, are the means by which the psalmist is lifted out of his depression in Psalm 73.”¹⁹

“This category of psalms refers to a group of psalms that reflect on wisdom, on the fate of both the righteous and the wicked, and on the Law as instruction from God. They are psalms that teach us to cultivate a long-term mindset, fixing our hearts and minds on what is truly ultimate, *the will of God*. They are distinguished by their reflective, meditative tone, and their didactic character. Some examples of wisdom psalms are 1, 14, 37, 73, 91, 112, 119, and 128”.²⁰

Messianic Psalms

Psalms 2, 22, 43, 110.

“Most of the so-called Royal Psalms could be re-categorized Messianic Psalms and were interpreted as such in the early Christian church, as witnessed in Christ’s general statement that the psalmists wrote of him (Lk 24:44) and by particular NT quotations.”²¹

“There are sixteen Messianic psalms in the Bible. These psalms are classified as "Messianic" because their burden is the suffering and victory of a Messiah King. In the New Testament these Psalms are used to identify Jesus as such a Messiah. In Greek the word *Christos*, [christ], is a translation of the Hebrew *Messiah* who was prophesied to be the future Israeli priest/king. Jesus is identified as the *Christ*, the anointed priest king of God’s kingdom. The Messianic Psalms are referred to and cited in the New Testament when teaching the gospel of Christ, the King of Kings.”²²

Liturgical Psalms

Psalm 13, 19, 30, 33, 108, 120, 135, *et al.*

“The Book of Psalms is a collection of hymns originally written for use in Jewish temple worship. Later, the psalms became part of the Old Testament. The psalms express a wide range of the deepest feelings and emotions that we all experience—joy, sorrow, anger, repentance, and so on. The psalms can serve as a model to help us pray. Jesus prayed the psalms and used them when he taught his followers.

Psalms have been an important part of Jewish and Christian worship throughout history. At Mass they are used during the Liturgy of the Word. During the Liturgy of the Word we call it a Responsorial Psalm, because it is a response by the people to the First Reading and because it is sung back and forth between the psalmist or cantor and the assembly.”²³

¹⁹ Elwell, “Psalms,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 2, p. 1803.

²⁰ Ken Boil, <https://kenboa.org/kenbo>, *Reflection Ministries, The Wisdom Psalms*.

²¹ Elwell, “Psalms,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 2, p. 1801.

²² Messianic Psalms. <https://www.prca.org/resources/publications/cr-news/item/1409-the-messianic-psalms>.

²³ Loyola Press, *Psalms*.

Zion Psalms

Psalms 15:1, 24:3, 46:7, 48:1, 50:2, 76:2, 81:10,11, 84:10, 87:2, 95:2, 122:6, 134:1.

For both the Jew and Christian, Zion became a euphemism for the *City of David* from where YHWH reigned over Israel and Judah.

For the Christian, Zion became a synonym for the seat of Jesus' reign over the Jewish Christians in the kingdom, then later his reign over the Gentile Christians.

Zion represents *the place where the Lord is "enthroned"*, and from which David yearns for salvation to emerge. In the Psalms, it is God who chose Zion, built the temple in Zion, and rules from Zion as universal king."²⁴

"Zion in Psalms is a city anointed by YHWH where He will dwell. It is defined as beautiful and worthy of glory. Christian believers associate Zion in Psalms as a city that God selected and gave to David. The Bible mentions Zion as the fortress of the City of David. It is the Lord's "holy mountain"

Imprecatory Psalms

"Approximately 20 psalms contain passionate pleas for the overthrow of the wicked in language which is often shocking to those illuminated by Christ's example and teaching (e.g., Pss 35:4–8; 41:10; 69:22–28; 109:6–20; 137:7–9). Any instant condemnation of this attitude must, however, be tempered by certain relevant considerations:

1. The cry for vengeance was not purely personal; it was firmly believed that God's honor was at stake (e.g., Ps 109:21). In an age where there was a less-developed view of an afterlife it was axiomatic that rewards and punishments, resulting from obedience or disobedience to God, must be observable within the sphere of this life. Whenever this was not apparent it would seem that no righteous God existed, and the name of God was dishonored (e.g., Ps 73:10). This burning desire for the eradication of evil and evil men sprang from a consciousness of a moral God and virtually demanded the triumph of truth.

2. The poetic, oriental attitude is naturally prone to the extreme language of hyperbole, a feature not confined to the psalms (e.g., Neh 4:4, 5; Jer 20:14–18; Am 7:17). Such language is startling; indeed, part of its function was probably to startle, to express and promote a sense of outrage.

In the pre-Christian period, therefore, such outbursts were not completely unjustifiable. But in the light of the fuller revelation in the NT such an attitude cannot now be condoned. The Christian is to love as Christ loved (Jn 13:34); to pray for his enemies and to forgive them (Mt 5:38–48; Col 3:13). The theme of judgment continues into the NT and is indeed heightened there, since Christ's coming has left man without excuse (Jn 16:8–11), but there can be no place for purely private vengeance."²⁵

Steadfast love Psalms

Psalms praising God for his steadfast love of the Lord are one of the most striking and common themes of the Psalms. There are over 242 expressions of God's steadfast love in 120 verses in the 150 Psalms.

Psalms 51, 57, 119, 136, *passim*.

Psalms praising God for his steadfast love of the Lord are one of the most striking and common themes of the Psalms.

The *steadfast love of the Lord, Yahweh/Jehovah*, is a recurrent theme in the book of Psalms. Since the expression appears in several of the various categories of Psalms it is difficult to describe them in only one category.

²⁴ Zion. [www.https://christianfaithguide.com/what-is-zion-in-psalms](https://christianfaithguide.com/what-is-zion-in-psalms).

²⁵ Elwell, "Psalms," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 2, p. 1802.

The Psalms are a replete repository for *praising God for his constant steadfast love*.

The word most often used by the Psalmists and Old Testament prophets is *hesed* is pronounced as *chesed* with a guttural *ch*! *Chesed* has a range of meanings defining the *compassionate love* God has for *his creation*.

Strong's Hebrew Lexicon. "*Chesed* is a rich and multifaceted term in the Hebrew Bible, often translated as "lovingkindness" or "steadfast love." It denotes *a deep, enduring love that is rooted in covenantal faithfulness and mercy*. *Chesed* is *not merely an emotional response but involves action and commitment*, often in the context of a relationship, particularly between God and His people. It encompasses *loyalty, kindness, and mercy, reflecting God's unwavering love and faithfulness.*"

Psalm 136 is a fine example extolling the ***steadfast love of the Lord, YHWH***.

"The liturgical structure of Psalm 136 draws attention to a group of psalms which clearly connect with the *cultus* [the religious practice of a religious group]. A similar antiphonal element appears in Psalm 15, often called a "liturgy of preparation for worship," and in Psalm 24, which may have been associated with a procession to the temple on a festival occasion. Psalm 84 is evidently a Pilgrim Psalm, while the Songs of Ascent (Pss 120–134) were probably also connected with the thrice-yearly pilgrimages to Jerusalem for the Feasts of Passover, Weeks, and Tabernacles.

The difficulties in any precise categorization of psalms are obvious; many refuse to fall neatly into one group, hence the occasional overlap. What is clearly evident is a pulsating, vital religious life which has found its clearest expression in the Book of Psalms. To say that it expresses the worship and devotion of the ordinary man is a simplification; kings and priests, wise men and prophets all contributed to this remarkable collection."²⁶

A common English anglicized word for *praises* offered to God is the Hebrew *Tehillim* meaning simply *praise or songs of praise*. Since the Psalms are predominantly "songs" or chants oriented towards praise for God, the word *Tehilim* is a euphemism for psalms as *songs of praise*. Specific *Tehillim* psalms include Psalm 20, Psalm 70, *et al*.

Here are some steadfast love examples

Psalm 119:90 "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever. Give thanks to the God of gods. His faithful love endures forever."

Psalm 136:1-3 "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."

Psalm 57:7-10 "For your steadfast love is great above the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the clouds."

Psalm 51:1-3 "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions."

Practical points from this chapter on the various Psalms in the Psalter

What is the primary meaning of the word *Tehilim*²⁷ when referring to the *psalms*?

How many Psalms are there in our traditional English *translations*?

How many *types* or *categories* of Psalms can you name? Which is your favorite category?

In what way can you, or your faith community, benefit by the *singing* of, or *reciting* the Psalms?

Use Psalm 1 as an example. What is the *direction* of "goal" of the Psalms

What are *liturgical* Psalms?

²⁶ Elwell, & Beitzel, *Psalms, Book Of, Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 2, p. 1803.

²⁷ The words *Tehilim* and *Tehillim* are anglicized renderings of a Hebrew word which primarily means *praises*. This describes the theology of the Psalms. The Greek word for Psalms is ψαλμοῖς, *psalmois*, songs sung or chanted toward God, the Hebrew word for Psalms as praise is *Tehilim*.

What does *antiphonal*²⁸ mean, and how can this enrich your worshipful devotion? What is the chief component of *antiphonal*? Words or action? What are you responding to in the antiphonal experience?

In what ways are some Psalms both *wisdom* literature and *Torah*—what does *Torah* mean?

What might your favorite Psalm be? Why?

Pick another Psalm! Why that choice? What does it mean to you?

²⁸ Antiphonal. Primarily in the context of singing in a community setting antiphonal means a song sung or recited by two groups with the one group, or a leader person, providing the lead and the other group responding to the leader.

Chapter 2: *Torah* Psalms. Psalms 1, 19, 119

Introduction

Bruggemann, Longman, and others observe that the Psalms, although presented in several styles, mostly carry within themselves *a clear instructional element* which defines them as *wisdom Torah* literature. *Torah* is defined in Judaism as *instruction and guidance regarding living righteous lives for God*.

Most Jewish leaders and teachers understand the close relationship between the terms *Law*, as in the *Law of Moses*, and the traditional Jewish term *Torah* which means *instruction*. Initially, especially among the Jewish Sadducees of Jesus' day, *Torah* referred to the *first five books* of the *Tanakh*, the Old Testament, which are also referred to as the *Pentateuch*, meaning *five books*.

However, Jewish scholars mostly understood *Law* to refer to the *principles of religious and social behavior* given to Israel by Moses on Mount Sinai. The *Law of Moses* was intended by God to explain to Israel *what kind of people they should be* if they were to be God's chosen people. The Law of Moses was intended to be as *Torah instructional* for righteous living before God.

Keeping the Law of Moses was never intended by God to be *the vehicle of entrance into his covenant people*. Paul explained in several of his Epistles, in particular Romans and Galatians, that entrance into God's covenant people had always, since the days of Abraham, clearly been *by faith toward God, and not by law keeping*.

The Law of Moses was always intended by God to be *instruction on right behavior* as a covenant people of God, hence, *Torah instruction*, for a *righteous relationship* with God.

Righteousness in the Jewish and Christian mindset was never *getting things right!* Rather righteousness stressed *living in a tight relationship with God* through faith in his *Torah instruction* as in the Law of Moses, or through faith in Jesus expressed in faithful discipleship with Jesus as described in the Sermon on the Mount.

Context determines how *Torah* is intended to be interpreted. It has a *wide range of applications*. Originally considered simply as *the first five books of the Old Testament*, the *Pentateuch*. Eventually in Jewish practice it became *used as referring to any part of the Old Testament, the Law, the Law of Moses*. All were understood as *God's instruction to Israel, hence, Torah*.

To appreciate the book of Psalms, notably the *Torah Psalms*, Psalm 1, 19, 119, *et al*, we must remember the need to see the term Law as referring to ***Torah instruction by God*** regarding righteous living.

Psalms 1, 19, and 119 are clearly psalms that build on *loving and honoring God's Law*, hence, they fall under the category of *Torah Psalms*.

Brueggemann enlarges on this by demonstrating that **Ps 19** is a *Torah Psalm*.

“The good order of creation is concretely experienced in Israel as the *torah*. The *torah* is understood not simply as Israelite moral values, but *as God's will and purpose, ordained in the very structure of life*. While the creation is sustained by God's faithfulness, it is also coherent and peaceable because of Israel's obedient attention to the way God has ordered life.”

Thus, creation and *torah* are understood together, the *torah* articulating God's intention for Israel in the creation. That linking of creation and *torah* is particularly evident in Psalm 19, which consists of two parts: *verses 1-6 as a celebration of the joy and wonder of creation, and verses 7-14 as an affirmation of the life-giving power of the torah.*¹

¹ Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, p. 15.

Theologically, the Psalms are not interested in *how* one *becomes* righteous. Their concern would be as with the concern of the apostle Paul in Romans and Galatians. One becomes righteous *by grace through faith*. The Psalms are directed toward those who by *God's grace through faith are already in a covenant relationship with God* by birth into a faithful Jewish family, by God's covenant with Abraham and Moses, and consequently by circumcision.

This, *Torah* in the Psalms is understood as *Wisdom Literature, Ketuvim, the sacred writings, wise council, wisdom from God, and instruction as to how to continue in a right relationship with God.*

Psalm 1. A Torah Psalm

“The Blessing of walking in the Law-Torah”

¹ **Blessed** is the man [he is Spiritually rich]
 who **walks not in the counsel of the wicked,**
 nor stands in the way of sinners,
 nor sits in the seat of scoffers; [Those who live daily in God's way and Torah guidance are *spiritually rich*.]

² **but his delight is in the law of the Lord,**
 [The spiritually rich person delights in following the *Torah* or God's instruction and guidance.
 The joy and delight come from previous experience with God and faith in his *Torah* instruction.]
 and on his law he **meditates** [in prayer and reflection] *day and night.*

³ *He is like a tree*
planted by streams of water;
 [He is constantly sustained by God's *Torah*.]
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.
 [God blesses those who stay close to him through his *Torah* guidance.]

⁴ *The wicked are not so,*
but are like chaff which the wind drives away.

⁵ *Therefore the wicked will 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 wicked will perish.”
 [God cares for those who keep a close relationship with him and his guidance.]

Comments

Psalm 1 expresses *wisdom* as **daily delight and meditation in the Torah and instruction of the Lord**—*we are encouraged to meditate on God's Law day and night.*

Psalm 1 is listed among the *Wisdom Literature* of Israel which includes *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, et al.* which explain the **wise life that brings God's blessings.**

The wise person is *blessed* and *spiritually rich* by *daily following God's wise instruction in the Torah.*

Torah Psalms are psalms intended to instruct the believer in *how to live* their lives in respect of God's purpose explained in the *Torah/Law.*

Psalm 119 is a larger development of a Torah wisdom

Psalm 119 is an *acrostic psalm* built around the letters of the Hebrew alphabet *making memory of the instruction easier.* The poetic repetition of words related to **Law** and **Torah** is impressive.

Psalm 119:1-5 reflects this wisdom:

¹ *Blessed are those whose way is blameless,*

who walk in the law [torah] of the Lord!

² *Blessed are those who keep his testimonies,
who seek him with their whole heart,*

³ *who also do no wrong,
but walk in his ways!*

⁴ *Thou hast commanded thy precepts
to be kept diligently.*

⁵ *O that my ways may be steadfast
in keeping thy statutes!*

The Christian understanding of the Torah of God

For the Jew living under the Abrahamic covenant and Law of Moses, and the sacred writings of Israel [what we designate as the Old Testament] referred to as the *Tanakh*, The *Torah* would include all of God's instruction to Israel, cf. Heb 1:1, 2, "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world."

The word *Tanakh* is a broad term for the 24 books of the Hebrew "Old Testament," including all of the *Torah* of God, *the full religious instruction of God*.

The word *Tanakh* is built by using the first letters of the terms that describe the makeup of the Hebrew Old Testament, *Torah, Nevi'im, Ketuvim*, hence, *TaNakh*.

This *Torah*, the religious instruction of God, was located initially in the *Pentateuch*, the first five books of the Old Testament, then gradually in the *Nevi'im*, the Prophets of God, and then also in the *Ketuvim*, the Sacred Writings of the Sages of Israel.

Incidentally, according to Heb 1:1, 2, Jesus becomes the *Torah* of both the Jews and the Christians, both Jewish and Gentile Christians!

Paul explained in several of his epistles that *faith in and living for Jesus Christ* fulfilled all of the instructions of *Torah requirements* found in the Old Testament Scriptures.

The *Torah* did not secure *entrance* into a covenant relationship with God which had from the beginning been by *faith in God*, cf. Abel, Noah, Abraham (Heb 11). *Torah* keeping was followed for *maintaining an appropriate relationship with God*.

The *Tanakh Torah* was treasured by Paul and early Christians as *wise instruction for spiritual living*.

1 Tim 3:14-17

¹² *Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³ while evil men and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived.*

¹⁴ *But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings [the *Tanakh* or *Torah*] which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training [instruction] in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."*

In his epistles to the Romans and Galatians Paul explained that Jesus Christ, in his life, death, and resurrection, had fulfilled every requirement of the Law of Moses, the *Torah*, regarding righteousness with God, that is, a *righteousness relationship with God*.

Gal 3:16-29:

¹⁶ *Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many; but, referring to one, "And to your offspring," which is Christ." ¹⁷ This is what I mean: the law, which came four hundred and thirty years afterward, does not annul a*

covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. ¹⁸ *For if the inheritance is by the law, it is no longer by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.*

¹⁹ *Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made; and it was ordained by angels through an intermediary.* ²⁰ *Now an intermediary implies more than one; but God is one.*

²¹ *Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not; for if a law had been given which could make alive, then righteousness would indeed be by the law.* ²² *But the scripture consigned all things to sin, that what was promised to faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.*

²³ *Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed.* ²⁴ *So that the law [the Torah] was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith.* ²⁵ *But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian;* ²⁶ *for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.* ²⁷ *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.* ²⁸ *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* ²⁹ *And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."*

Rom 3:21-26:

²¹ *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested **apart from law** [Torah keeping] although the law and the prophets bear witness to it [the Law, the Torah or Tanakh],* ²² *the righteousness of **God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.*** [Jesus fulfilled and did what the Torah and Tanakh could not do.] *For there is no distinction;* ²³ *since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,* ²⁴ *they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus,* ²⁵ *whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins;* ²⁶ *it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus."*

Luke 24:44-49:

⁴⁴ *Then he said to them, "These are my words which 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.**"* ⁴⁵ *Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,* ⁴⁶ *and said to them, "**Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,*** ⁴⁷ *and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.* ⁴⁸ *You are witnesses of these things.* ⁴⁹ *And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high."*

Summary

The **Torah**, as presented in the Psalms and wisdom literature, was *not intended to save anyone*. Its purpose was to *instruct believers on right living in a relationship with God*.

Faith in God's grace and the **death and resurrection of Jesus** was intended to save the sinner and bring them into a right relationship with God.

Faith in following Jesus as the fulfilled **Torah** for both Jews and Christians saw Jesus replace the legal aspects of the Law in the **Christian Torah's** instruction for a righteous relationship with God. Have a look at Gal 3:19-29.

The validity of the **Torah** of the Psalms was not diminished by the **Jesus-Torah**, [who became the **standard of faithful living for and with God**] for the **Torah** correctly understood as God's instruction continues as **wisdom instruction on how to live in a right relationship with God**.

Torah in any form [instruction in Exodus, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Jesus, the apostolic Epistles] *is of excellent value for instruction for spiritual fulfillment and living for God*.

What does Paul teach about the Christian Torah life?

Gal 5:16-26. Paul equates walking by the Spirit to living by the Torah. Christian Torah living involves being instructed by the Spirit to live with God.

¹⁶ But I say, **walk by the Spirit**, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. ¹⁸ **But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law.** ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law.** ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

²⁵ **If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.** ²⁶ Let us have no self-conceit, no provoking of one another, no envy of one another.”

What does the Apostle John say about this?

1 John 1:7. “... *if we walk in the light*, [the Christian wisdom Torah is Christ and His gospel message and teaching] *as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.*”

[Under the Mosaic Covenant fellowship with God was based on faithfulness to His Torah, the Tanakh teaching. In the Christian era fellowship with God and Christ is entered by faith in Jesus, repentance, and being baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of sins. Fellowship with God and Christ is maintained by being led by the Holy Spirit and being instructed by the Christ/torah, both the Old Testament and the canonical New Testament.]

What does walking in the light of Christ mean?

This involves *living a life attached to Christ, the vine*, [John 15:5, really believing, trusting, in Christ, John 14:1, 1 Pet 2:21, 1 John 2:6, 1 Cor 11:1, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ”]. It implies *living in Christ where his blood cleanses us daily from our sins* [1 John 1:5-7]. It means *having daily fellowship with Christ in prayer and in his word* [cf. Paul in Col3:16].

Psalm 19 - another Torah Psalm

Psalm 19 verses 1 and 7 set the tone for this Psalm. Both the beauty of the heavens and the Torah bear testimony to the glory of God.

Psalm 19 poetically praises the glory of the Torah by comparing it to the glory of the heavens.

¹ *The heavens are telling the glory of God;*

and the firmament proclaims his handiwork ...

Psalm 19:7-9 extolls the benefits of following the Law-Torah.

⁷ *The law of the Lord is perfect,*

reviving the soul;

the testimony of the Lord is sure,

making wise the simple;

⁸ *the precepts of the Lord are right,*

rejoicing the heart;

the commandment of the Lord is pure,

enlightening the eyes;

⁹ *the fear of the Lord is clean,*

enduring forever;

*the ordinances of the Lord are true,
and righteous altogether”*

Bratcher and Reyburn comment on the structure of this Psalm

“This psalm consists of two different compositions: one, *a hymn celebrating God’s glory as revealed by the sky and the sun* (verses 1–6), and the other, *a poem in praise of the Law, in which Yahweh’s will is revealed* (verses 7–14). The two differ in content, style, and poetic meter. Most scholars think that the first poem is considerably older, since it reflects themes similar to those of Near Eastern mythologies, while *the second one reflects a time in which the written Law* (the Torah) was already the basis of the faith of Israel...

In this poem (verses 7–14) the psalmist first *describes the Law of Yahweh in six diverse ways* (verses 7–9), praises its attractiveness and worth (verses 10–11), and prays for help from the Lord in obeying it (verses 12–14).

In verses 7–9 six words are used for the Law, the sacred record of Yahweh’s instructions to his people (see Psa 119, where eight words are used). The first one, *Torah (law)*, is used in 1:2 (see comments); the sixth one, *ordinances ...* was seen as “judgment” in 7:6. The other words are: verse 7c *testimony*, a word meaning reminder, instruction; verse 8a *precepts*, a word always used in the plural, meaning orders, legal directives; verse 8c *commandment*, meaning law, command. *All five of these words are nearly synonymous in this context, since the psalmist was searching for words that emphasize various aspects of the same thing, God’s Law.* The translator will have to determine whether to use a single term for all, or a similar set of terms.”²

Tremper Tillman observes that Psalm 19 praises God for his self-revelation

“Psalm 19 is best known for its *thoughtful and powerful reflection upon God’s self-disclosure to humanity. He makes himself known through his creation, in particular through the skies dominated during the day by the sun* (vv. 1–6), *and through the law* (vv. 7–11). As Brown suggests, ‘The sun’s traditional association with justice and law in Near Eastern antiquity *provides strong precedent for the connection between the sun and torah* in Psalm 19’ (Brown 2010: 262). If these verses were the sum total of the poem, then it would be properly designated a wisdom poem. However, verses 12–13 introduce a confession of sin, both wilful and hidden, as well as an appeal to God for help, thus indicating that *Psalm 19 is a lament.* The psalm ends with the composer’s request that God would accept his prayer.”³

Psalm 1 is comprised of two poems

Poem one

*“¹ The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.*

[Note the parallelism between verses 1ff and 7ff.]

*² Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.*

*³ There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;*

*⁴ yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.*

In them he has set a tent for the sun,

² Bratcher and Reyburn, *Handbook on the book of Psalms*, p. 188-192. Some emphases mine, IAF.

³ Longman, *Psalms*, pp. 117-118.

⁵ *which comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and like a strong man runs its course with joy.*

⁶ *Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them;
and there is nothing hid from its heat.*

Poem two

⁷ *The law of the Lord is perfect,
reviving the soul;*

*the testimony of the Lord is sure,
making wise the simple;*

⁸ *the precepts of the Lord are right,
rejoicing the heart;*

*the commandment of the Lord is pure,
enlightening the eyes;*

⁹ *the fear of the Lord is clean,
enduring forever;*

*the ordinances [Torah] of the Lord are true,
and righteous altogether.*

¹⁰ *More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.”*

Comment on the Psalm

The perceived regular reliable testimony of **creation**, the sun, moon, and stars are paralleled by the trusted reliability of the **Torah**.

As the creation, stars of the heavens can be trusted to always be reliable, so can the ordinances of the **Torah**!

Psalm 119. Walking in the Law as the Torah instruction of the Lord

This Psalm is the longest Psalm or chapter in the Bible; 176 verses!

It is a beautiful, carefully structured poem built progressively around the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, *aleph, bet, gimmel, dalet*. Each section or *stanza* of *eight verses* opens alphabetically with a word beginning with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet!

Verses 1 through 5 set the tone for the whole Psalm.

“¹ **Blessed** [spiritually rich] are those **whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord!**

² **Blessed** are those **who keep his testimonies**,
who seek him with their whole heart,

³ who also do no wrong,
but walk in his ways!

⁴ **Thou hast commanded thy precepts
to be kept diligently.**

⁵ O that **my ways may be steadfast
in keeping thy statutes!**”

Bratcher and Reyburn comment on the primary message of Psalm 119

“In the opening *strophe* (letter *alef*, verses 1–8) the psalmist praises the law of Yahweh as the sure way to happiness and pledges himself to obey it faithfully.

The psalm opens, as does Psalm 1, praising *those whose way is blameless*. For *Blessed* see 1:1. *Way* in line a is used synonymously with *walk in* in line b (see “walk” in 78:10); both mean conduct, behavior, manner of life. The word *blameless* (or “*faultless*”) indicates total conformity with the requirements of the Torah, which is the complete and perfect expression of the will of God. The Hebrew word for *law*, *torah*, is derived from the verb “to teach,” so Torah is to be thought of in terms of “teaching” or “instruction” (see 78:1, where the same word is translated “teaching”); ... “the teaching of the Lord.” Yahweh’s “teaching,” of course, has the full force of command. *Whose way is blameless* or ... “*whose lives are faultless*” must often be recast in other languages to make explicit either the words of blame or the people who express the blame; for example, “Happy are the people against whom no bad words are spoken,” or sometimes idiomatically, “How fortunate are people when no one puts their tongues against them.” *Law of the Lord* must often be expressed as a clause; for example, “who live the way the Lord has commanded them.”⁴

Comment

This theme becomes a constant theme throughout the Psalm praising God for his rich instruction in the Torah Law.

The student of this psalm is encouraged to read this rich hymn, meditate, and pray over each stanza.

The striking acrostic repetition of the poem *in Hebrew* **was intended to maintain the steady praise for God and his instruction for righteous living.**

Many world religions adopt similar disciplines through their prayer-bead practices. The prevalence of prayer-bead practice among different religions illustrates the breadth of the belief in the power of repetitive prayer practice.

Prayer-beads are used to encourage the repetitions of prayers, chants, or mantras by members of various religious groups such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and some Protestant churches.

The acrostic alphabet model of Psalm 119, and some other psalms, became an “*iconic memory model*” for *prayer and praise repetition for the Jews* and early Jewish Christian converts.

Discussion topics on the Torah Psalms

Which are some *Torah* Psalms? Why are they so prevalent and helpful in the Book of Psalms?

Why could a *Torah* Psalm also fall under the category of *Wisdom Psalms*?

Discuss why Psalm 1 would be an example of all of the Psalms, and be helpful to one in a stressful period of life?

What is so unique about Psalm 119? Mention several points.

How could the *Torah* Psalms be good reading and meditation today?

Pick a *Torah* Psalm and describe why it is important to you. *Pray over that Psalm.*

What is the major theme of the *Torah* as it is referenced in the *Wisdom Psalms*? How is *Law* intended to be understood when *Torah* and *TaNaKh* are rendered **Law** in English bibles??

⁴ Bratcher and Reyburn, *Handbook on the book of Psalms*, p. 998.

Chapter 3: Psalms of Personal Trust. Psalms 23, 27, 34

Limberg comments on these personal trust Psalms

“The Psalms of Trust ... speak of the Lord with a variety of imagery. *The Lord is the place where the hurting take refuge* (11:1; 16:1; cf. 2:12). *The Lord is a shepherd who guides and comforts his sheep or a gracious host who provides a banquet in the midst of danger* (Psalm 23). *The Lord is a rock, refuge, and fortress* (62:2, 6–7), or like a mother providing peace and safety for a nursing child (Psalm 131). The Lord is even compared to a bird, under whose wings the faithful can find both security and joy (63:7).”¹

Ewell and Beitzel, Baker Bible Dictionary

There are additional Psalms that could be included in the trust category.

“While some of these may also be classified as laments, the dominant feature of this group is the *serene trust in God revealed*, which makes them particularly *suitable for devotional use*.

Many begin with an affirmation of gratitude to and affection for God. Psalms 23 and 27 are the outstanding examples of this type, which type could also include Psalms 11; 16; 62; 116; 131; and 138.”²

Psalm 23. The Lord is my Shepherd

Tremper Longman

“Psalm 23 is a song of confidence or trust in the Lord. *The psalmist expresses trust in the midst of attack* ... Traditionally, this psalm has been taken as comfort for those who are nearing death. This specific application arose from the translation of verses 4a–b as: ‘Even though I walk through the shadow of death’, and verse 6c as: ‘I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.’ These renderings are now considered doubtful, with the result that Psalm 23 *has a much broader application to all who suffer difficulties in life*. Of course, those difficulties include sickness and death, *so the psalm is still rightly encouraging to those who struggle with their mortality*. The opening metaphor of the psalm *describes God as shepherd and the psalmist as one of his sheep*. As noted in the Comment section, *the metaphor is more than pastoral; it is also royal*. God is the royal shepherd who cares for his people. The psalmist expresses this relationship in an intensely personal and intimate manner. God is a shepherd to him, and, as such, protects and guides the psalmist on the right paths (v. 3b). The second part of the psalm introduces a new metaphor: *God as host of a banquet at which the psalmist is an honoured guest*. The host metaphor may not completely interrupt the shepherd metaphor, since God the shepherd could be hosting the banquet, although the psalmist is now treated as a human guest, not an animal. The interpretation below will suggest that the personification of God’s goodness and love in verse 6 should be read in the light of the shepherd image. The psalm’s title associates it with David, who, of course, was a shepherd as a young man (1 Sam. 16:11) and was also called to shepherd the people of Israel as their king (2 Sam. 5:2).”³

Psalm 23

“A Psalm of David

¹ **The Lord is my shepherd** [The Lord Jehovah or Yahweh is my guide and helper during times of stress]; *I shall not want;*

² *he makes me lie down in green pastures* [He provides a safe refuge].

¹ Linberg, “Psalms,” *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5, p. 535. Some emphases IAF.

² Ewell and Beitzel, “Psalms,” *Baker Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2, p. 1803.

³ Longman, *Psalms*, pp. 133-134.

He leads me beside still waters;
³ he restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness
 for his name's sake.
⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
 I fear no evil;
 for thou art with me;
 thy rod and thy staff,
 they comfort me. [He adds stability and peace to my life.]
⁵ Thou **preparest a table** before me
 in the presence of my enemies [He provides sustenance and strength];
 thou anointest my head with oil,
 my cup overflows [He blesses me abundantly beyond my needs],
⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
 all the days of my life;
 and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
 forever [A covenant promise to God of faithfulness].”

Comments on the Text

Most people in a “Jewish or Christian” world know this favorite Psalm. We have memorized it, sung it, and preached it for centuries, *all with good reason and intention. We believe our God is a mighty, loving God who cares for his people.*

All believers have experienced times of tragedy and loss and have turned to God for comfort and help in confidence that he will respond.

This psalm is not a simple prayer for help but is *a responsive praise of a trusting believer expressing trust and confidence in God.*

Nevertheless, there is an element of prayer in the expression and citing of this Psalm

David uses two metaphors to describe God and what the blessings are that God provides the believer; *a shepherd* and *a banquet host*. Both would be familiar to both David and his audience. David was himself *a shepherd who protected his sheep*, and *as a king*, was also a *banquet host*.

First, like a good shepherd God leads us to spiritual sustenance and safety. There are hints of God providing this in His *Torah* guidance as in Psalms 1, 119.

Second, like a benevolent host God invites us into his house for a great spiritual banquet.

At Eph 1:3ff Paul explains that in Christ *God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing we need.* Psalm 23 emphasizes God's promises.

Peter likewise states at 2 Peter 1:3 that *God in his divine power has granted to us things that pertain to life and godliness.*

Third, encouraging thoughts of praise come to mind in remembering God's *loving care of his people*, and in his provision of *a safe harbor of safety* in the *Torah* and *Jesus*.

In keeping with this message, Psalm 136 powerfully emphasizes that “*the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases*”.

Paul states at Phil 4:4-7 that God provides those in Christ with *a peace that passes all understanding.*

Fourth, it is not by accident that Psalm 23 follows Psalm 22 in the Hebrew canon indicating a continuance of *faith in God's steadfast love and support*, possibly lending some corrective balance to some misunderstandings of Psalm 22:1, 2 of God *supposedly forsaking* Jesus on the cross! *Read the discussion of Psalm 22 in Chapter 5, Lament Psalms.*

Psalm 27 The Lord is my strength

“A Psalm of David.

¹ *The Lord is **my light and my salvation;**
whom shall I fear?*

*The Lord is the **stronghold** of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?*

[God is the true strength needed for victory in life, and the stronghold or fortress of our life. John wrote, “*faith is the victory that overcomes the world!*” 1 John 5:4.]

² *When evildoers assail me,
uttering slanders against me,
my adversaries and foes,
they shall stumble and fall.*

³ *Though a host encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;*

[God is really on my side! My past experience of God’s faithfulness sustains me.]

*though war arise against me,
yet I will be confident.*

⁴ *One thing have I asked of the Lord,*

that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,

to behold the beauty of the Lord,

and to inquire in his temple.

[Seeking God’s help through devotion and prayer are essential for spiritual growth and strength.]

⁵ *For he will hide me in his shelter*

in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent, he will set me high upon a rock.

[God surrounds us with his presence through his indwelling Holy Spirit.]

⁶ *And now my head shall be lifted up*

above my enemies round about me;

and I will offer in his tent

sacrifices with shouts of joy;

I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

⁷ ***Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud,***

be gracious to me and answer me!

⁸ *Thou hast said, “Seek ye my face.”*

My heart says to thee,

“Thy face, Lord, do I seek.”

⁹ *Hide not thy face from me.*

Turn not thy servant away in anger,

thou who hast been my help.

*Cast me not off, **forsake me not,***

O God of my salvation!

¹⁰ *For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me up.*

¹¹ ***Teach me thy way, O Lord;***

and lead me on a level path

because of my enemies.

[Torah instruction in the Word of God is needed for strength.]

¹² *Give me not up to the will of my adversaries; for false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence.*

¹³ *I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord **in the land of the living!***

¹⁴ **Wait for the Lord;**
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
yea, wait for the Lord!
 [Be patient and let God do his work in our lives.]

Comments on Psalm 27

Note how similar this Psalm is to Psalm 23. Its lessons must have been trusted and important for it to be so strongly associated with Psalm 23.

David obviously was experiencing *one of the low points in his life* but knew that keeping a firm relationship with God was essential to his spiritual strength.

We all experience such low points in life!

Admitting to one's weakness and failings is essential to receiving the faith, strength, and peace [provided by the presence and working of God's Holy Spirit in our lives] which strength is needed to sustain our effectiveness, and receiving the strength that comes from God.

At **Eph 3:14-21** Paul assures us of this strength:

¹⁴ *For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,* ¹⁵ *from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,* ¹⁶ *that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man,* ¹⁷ *and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,* ¹⁸ *may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,* ¹⁹ *and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fulness of God.*

²⁰ *Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think,* ²¹ *to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.*

Waiting on the Lord implies faith and patience and admitting submission to God's will and presence!

Psalm 34. Praise God for his goodness

Bratcher and Reyburn

"This psalm, like Psalm 25, is an *incomplete acrostic poem*, each line beginning with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, from *alef* to *taw* (see the Introduction to Psa 25. The letter *waw* (sixth in the alphabet) is not represented, and the last verse is outside the scheme altogether.

The psalm is a *hymn of thanksgiving* (see Psa 30; 32) *by an individual who has been freed from some unspecified difficulty* (verse 4). The requirements of the acrostic scheme caused the author to compose without logical order or progression of thought. The first part (verses 1–3) is a *hymn of praise to Yahweh*, followed by a tribute to his provident care, of which the psalmist had personal experience (verses 4–10). The main body of the psalm (verses 11–22) is in the form of *instruction concerning the right way to live and its rewards*, and the punishment awaiting those who disregard God's laws."¹

I will refer to the first 10 verses as an illustration of the depth of the psalmist's praise.

¹ *I will **ble**ss the Lord at all times;*
*his praise shall **continually be in my mouth.***

² *My soul makes its **bo**ast in the Lord;*
let the afflicted hear and be glad.

³ *O **ma**gnify the Lord with me,*
and let us exalt his name together!

⁴ *I **sou**ght the Lord, and he answered me,*
*and **deli**vered me from all my fears.*

⁵ *Look to him, and be radiant;*
so your faces shall never be ashamed.

¹ Bratcher and Reyburn, *Psalms*, p. 319.

⁶ *This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him,
and saved him out of all his troubles.*

⁷ *The angel of the Lord encamps
around those who fear him and delivers them.*

[The Psalm assures us of the constant presence of the Lord, the Holy Spirit, and God's angels in our lives. We need to trust God and his promises!]

⁸ *O taste and see that **the Lord is good!**
Happy is the man who **takes refuge in him!***

⁹ *O fear the Lord, you his saints,
for those who fear him have no want!*

¹⁰ *The young lions suffer want and hunger;
but those who seek the Lord **lack no good thing.**"*

Comments on the Praise Psalms

Some churches incorporate the sentiments of the Praise Psalms in a liturgical pattern as in several *Psalters*² used by different churches and religious groups such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and the Church of England. This practice is the natural result of the praise and worshipful nature of these liturgical Praise Psalms. *They were intended by the psalmist or poet to be used privately and corporately in the worship and praise of God.*

Free churches like the Baptist Church, Community Churches, and the Church of Christ incorporate Praise and Lament Psalms in their local church hymnals, along with other hymns of specific meaning to the churches. For instance, the song book used by the church where I worship, the Church of Christ on McDermot Road, *Songs of Faith and Praise*, includes over 1,000 hymns. In this collection the grouping of Praise and Thanksgiving includes over 20 hymns and Psalms. Many of the hymns in this songbook are *praise, thanksgiving, and hymns of exaltation* drawn from the Psalms, including Psalms 23, 19, 66, 91, 104, 105, 136, and 145.

Discussion topics

What appeals to you about Psalm 23? Read the Psalm, then meditate on what remembering its two themes might contribute to spiritual strength.

How would you describe your emotions after reciting Psalm 23 and 27?

Under what circumstances would Psalms 23 and 27 be most appropriate for a believer to meditate and pray over?

When would be an enjoyable time to refer to and meditate on Psalm 34? What main thoughts surface from reading this Psalm?

How could Psalm 34 enrich a devotional or worship service? What is a central theme of the Psalm?

² *Psalters* refers to a collection of Psalms and some Scriptures as guides for the liturgical pattern of some churches whose liturgies are governed by synods or religious convocations.

Chapter 4. Penitential¹ Psalms. Psalms 31(32), 37(38), 50(51), (61), 101(102), 129(130)

[The Psalms numbered in parentheses (32) are as numbered in the English RSV Bible.]

The Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible

The church's inclusion of the penitential Psalms in its Psalter is interesting!

"Psalms 32; 38; 51; 130 are the clearest examples of penitential Psalms, traditionally the church has also included Psalms 6; 102; 143, although there is no explicit confession of sin.

However ... in an age when adversity in its various forms was seen as God's judgment for wrongdoing, the admission of distress was tantamount to a confession of guilt.

In the four main examples there is an *intensity of feeling and a deep sense of the enormity of sin in God's sight*, although, as elsewhere, there is no indication of specific sin, even in Psalm 51, which is surely to be connected with David's sin against Bathsheba (2 Sam 11; 12). Significantly, David bypasses the sacrificial system, which was inefficacious in his case, casting himself entirely on the mercy of God (Ps 51:1, 16).

The burden of unconfessed sin is clearly revealed in Psalm 32 and sin's searing corrupting effect in Psalm 38. In Psalm 130 an originally individual lament has been augmented by two verses (7, 8) to adapt it for national use."²

The different numbering of the Penitential Psalms in the English and Hebrew Bibles can be a little confusing but not to where they cannot be identified as a penitential outpouring of faith.

Psalm 51. David's Great Penitential Psalm

Psalm 51 is one of the best-known Davidic Psalms for several reasons:

First, it reaches into all of our minds and hearts when we recognize our own sinful nature and need for repentance, and for God's loving mercy and forgiveness.

Second it recalls one of the most tragic yet best known events in David's life, his sinful adultery with Bathsheba, and his subsequent murder of her husband, Uriah. The narrative of this is well recorded in 2 Sam 11:1-12:31. The reader is encouraged to read this sad narrative, and then read of David's repentance which he so powerfully recounts in this heart-wrenching Psalm.

The Psalm with its superscript is long, but worthy of its full introductory presentation.

*"To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone into Bathsheba."*³

Bratcher and Reyburn open their comments on the Psalm with the following helpful comments:

"The initial verb *Have mercy* (verse 1a) is often used in the Psalms; it means *to show favor, to be kindly disposed* (see 4:1c, where the same verb is translated "Be gracious"). *Have mercy on me* is sometimes rendered in idiomatic language; for example, "Have a white heart for me" or "Be pained for me."

The two qualities of God on which the psalmist depends for forgiveness are *his steadfast love* (verse 1a; see comments at 5:7) and *his mercy* (verse 1b). The Hebrew word translated *mercy* is plural in form, and when it has this sense it is always plural. In some contexts it means "bowels," and the singular form means "womb." The word carries a sense of *intense emotion, of deep-seated feelings, which one has for a person who is especially near and dear*.

¹ Penitential, expressing deep repentance and sorrow for sins especially against God.

² Elwell, "Psalms," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 2, p. 1803.

³ Superscript to Psalm 51.

In the opening prayer for forgiveness, three different words for sin are used: **transgressions** (verse 1b) are primarily acts of disobedience, of rebellion; **iniquity** (verse 2a) is guilt, fault, a deliberate act of misconduct; and **sin** (verse 2b) is the most general word used in the Old Testament; it has basically the idea of going astray, of missing the mark.⁴

¹ *Have mercy on me, O God,
according to thy steadfast love;
according to thy abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.*

² *Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!*

³ *For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.*

⁴ *Against thee, thee only, have I sinned,
[See comment below in exegetical notes.]
and done that which is evil in thy sight, so that thou art justified in thy sentence and blameless in thy judgment [possibly reflected in Nathan's message from God].*

⁵ *Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

[In this opening prayer for forgiveness, three different words for **sin** are used: **transgressions** (verse 1b) are primarily acts of disobedience, of rebellion; **iniquity** (verse 2a) is guilt, fault, a deliberate act of misconduct; and **sin** (verse 2b) is the most general word used in the Old Testament; it has basically the idea of going astray, of missing the mark.

David is not stating that he was born a sinner, only that he was born into a world of sinners.

David was either speaking in this Psalm of his mother's sin at conception, or of his own recognition of his sinful nature!

*desirest truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.*

⁷ *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

⁸ *Fill me with joy and gladness;
let the bones which thou hast broken rejoice.*

⁹ *Hide thy face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.*

¹⁰ *Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.*

¹¹ *Cast me not away from thy presence,
and take not thy holy Spirit from me.*

¹² *Restore to me the joy of thy salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.*

¹³ *Then I will teach transgressors thy ways,
and sinners will return to thee.*

¹⁴ *Deliver me from blood guiltiness,
[See the comment below on hereditary sin at Psalm 51:7 in the exegetical comments.]*

O God, thou God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of thy deliverance.

¹⁵ *O Lord, open thou my lips,
and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.*

¹⁶ *For thou hast no delight in sacrifice;*

Were [sic] I to give a burnt offering, thou wouldst not be pleased.

¹⁷ *The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*

⁴ Bratcher and Reyburn, "Psalms," p. 468.

¹⁸ *Do good to Zion in thy good pleasure;
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem,
¹⁹ then wilt thou delight in right sacrifices,
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;
then bulls will be offered on thy altar.”*

Comments on the Text

Bratcher and Reyburn observe: “This psalm is a prayer of confession by an individual who has sinned and who comes to God confessing his sin and *asking for forgiveness*, that is, *a restoration of the fellowship with God* which has been broken by sin. It is classified as one of the seven penitential psalms (see introduction to Ps 32).

The identity of the psalmist and the reason he composed this prayer are given in the Hebrew title as David’s act of adultery with Bathsheba ...

The psalm begins with a **prayer for forgiveness** (verses 1–2), followed by a **confession of sin** (verses 3–5). The psalmist prays for **a restoration of fellowship with God** and a **spiritual renewal**, ending with a **promise to bring sinners back to God** (verses 6–13).

The penitent sinner promises to offer his praise to God and to present the kind of sacrifice that pleases God (verses 14–17).

The last two verses are a prayer asking God to restore Jerusalem so that sacrifices may again be offered to him at the Temple (verses 18–19).⁵

The structure of the Psalm proposed by Bratcher and Reyburn has been the outline of many excellent sermons and bible lessons for the simple reason of its beauty and thoughtfulness reminding Christians of the need for lament over sinfulness and the extent of repentance that should follow.

Exegetical comments

Ps 51:1. Bratcher and Rayburn note, “The initial verb *Have mercy* (verse 1a) is often used in the Psalms; it means to show favor, to be kindly disposed (see 4:1c, where the same verb is translated “Be gracious”). *Have mercy on me* is sometimes rendered in idiomatic language; for example, “Have a white heart for me” or “Be pained for me.”

The two qualities of God on which the psalmist depends for forgiveness are his *steadfast love* (verse 1a; see comments at 5:7) and his *mercy* (verse 1b). The Hebrew word translated *mercy* is plural in form, and when it has this sense it is always plural. In some contexts it means “bowels,” and the singular form means “womb.” The word carries a sense of intense emotion, of deep-seated feelings, which one has for a person who is especially near and dear.

As mentioned above, in this opening prayer for forgiveness, three different words for sin are used: transgressions (verse 1b) are primarily acts of disobedience, of rebellion; iniquity (verse 2a) is guilt, fault, a deliberate act of misconduct; and sin (verse 2b) is the most general word used in the Old Testament; it has basically the idea of going astray, of missing the mark.

The request to forgive is expressed by three verbs: *to blot out* (verse 1b) is to wipe out, like rubbing out an item on a list (see 9:5); *wash* represents sin as a stain that has to be washed out; the verb expresses the way in which clothes were washed by being beaten against rocks to remove the dirt; and *cleanse* means to purify; here sin is thought of as a defilement which renders a person ritually unclean and which must be removed so that he or she can be pronounced clean and rejoin the community.”⁶

Brueggemann adds, “Verses 1-2 provide for us the basic themes and vocabulary of confession. The remainder of the psalm may be taken as an exploration of the implication’s cations of this initial

⁵ Bratcher and Reyburn, *Handbook on the Psalms*, p. 467.

⁶ Bratcher and Reyburn, “Psalms,” p. 468.

statement. On the one hand, the basic words of forgiveness and graciousness are given. Everything Yahweh needs to show is listed: mercy, steadfast love, mercy, together with three cultic words, blot out, wash, cleanse. The petition addressed to Yahweh involves two systems of words, covenantal and cultic. Yahweh needs to take a fresh initiative with this one whose actions have distorted everything. The covenantal words urged, and the cultic actions requested are not mutually exclusive, nor are they the same. The psalm does see that the cultic acts of forgiveness are a mode through which the actual pardon of Yahweh is made available. Cultic action is real, transformative action.

On the other hand, the psalm has the speaker again use the primary vocabulary for sin as we have seen it in Psalm 32: transgression, iniquity, and sin. At the outset, the speaker holds nothing back. He exhibits the attitude of the later hymnwriter, "Nothing in my hand I bring." This is the prayer of an empty-handed person. So the words provide a proper evangelical match. Complete forfeiture of self, on the one hand; desperate trust in God, on the other."⁷

Ps 51: 4. Bratcher and Rayburn observe regarding this theologically sensitive confession, "He confesses that his sin was against God: *Against thee, thee only* is what he says. Some ... point out that it would be difficult for David to have said that, since his sin was against Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, and against Bathsheba as well. *But the ardor of the psalmist's confession and his recognition that sin is primarily an offense against God ...* And it should be noted that David, when confronted with the denunciation of his adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband Uriah, confessed: "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Sam 12:13) ... To sin against is sometimes rendered "to sin in your eyes;" for example, "I have sinned in your eyes—only in your eyes."⁸ It is also possible to say, for example, "I have sinned and offended you."

Ps. 51:7. "In vivid language the psalmist confesses that he has been a sinner all his life. *The literal language, "In iniquity I was given birth, and in sin my mother conceived me" (see 58:3), is hardly the basis for biological, anthropological, or theological pronouncements about the nature of the human being born a sinner!* Were the words to be taken literally, they would mean that the psalmist's mother sinned when she became pregnant (*which implies either that sexual intercourse as such is sinful or that she was guilty of fornication or adultery*), and that *at the moment of his birth he was already a sinner.* What the psalmist is saying is that *he* (and so, by implication, everyone) *is a sinner; sin is ingrained in human nature and permeates all of human activity.* In some languages it may be better to follow the example of ... "*Wrong and guilt have characterized my life ever since my mother gave birth to me.*"⁹

Hereditary Sin and Depravity of Newborn Babies

Here are some Scriptures which address the false teaching of hereditary sin, or the total depravity of a newborn baby. God, in Scripture, and Paul speak of each person being responsible for their own sin and not inheriting sin from their parents, either mother or father.

The image of man in the *Torah, Tanakh,* and New Testament is that *man learns to sin* from his environment, not from his genetic. ***Sin is what man does, not what he inherits.***

Rom 3:9 is a favorite text used by many to support the doctrine of inherited sin and total depravity of a newborn baby.

⁹ *What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all; for I have already charged that all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, ¹⁰ as it is written:*

"None is righteous, no, not one;

⁷ Brueggemann. *Message of the Psalms*, pp. 98-99.

⁸ Bratcher and Reyburn, "Psalms," p. 469.

⁹ Bratcher and Reyburn, *Handbook on the Psalms*, pp. 469-470.

¹¹ *no one understands, no one seeks for God.* ¹² *All have **turned aside**, together they have **gone wrong**; no one does good, not even one.*”

¹³ *“Their throat is an open grave, they use their tongues to deceive.”*

“The venom of asps is under their lips.”

¹⁴ *“Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”*

¹⁵ *“Their feet are swift to shed blood,*

¹⁶ *in their paths are ruin and misery,*

¹⁷ *and the way of peace they do not know.”*

¹⁸ *“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*

Paul was not making a heavy theological argument for inherited sin, he is merely making a psychological or sociological observation of the *sinful nature of people, **not babies!***

His observation was that people manifest sinful behavior from what they have learned from their human society and culture.

Paul is not arguing that people were born inheriting sin! He clearly states that they have **turned aside** and **gone wrong**, not that they were *born wrong!*

Rom 6:15-19. It certainly sounds that sin is something you do, not something you inherit!

“¹⁵ What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶ Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to any one as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸ and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹ I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once yielded your members to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now yield your members to righteousness for sanctification.”

Ezek 18:19,20.

*“¹⁹ “Yet you say, ‘Why should not the son suffer for the iniquity of the father?’ When the son has done what is lawful and right, and has been careful to observe all my statutes, he shall surely live. ²⁰ **The soul that sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.**”*

Deut 24:16.

“¹⁶ “The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor shall the children be put to death for the fathers; every man shall be put to death for his own sin.”

Ps 51:14. “It is not certain whether the Hebrew “bloods” (RSV *bloodguiltiness*) in verse 14a refers to the psalmist’s own shed blood “death” (see rsv footnote) or to the shedding of the blood of others, “murder.” ... On the whole it seems better to understand the words as a request that God spare the psalmist from violent and premature death ... So ... “God, you are my savior! I deserve death but spare me!”¹⁰

Discussion points

What can we learn about the depth of repentance in David’s penitential Psalms?

What were David’s primary sins in the Bathsheba narrative? But David clearly says he sinned against God. The point is that others have also been in David’s sin.

¹⁰ Bratcher and Reyburn, *Handbook on the Psalms*, pp. 474–475.

We must also demonstrate repentance and seek forgiveness from them.

Practical thoughts regarding confession, repentance, and forgiveness

Below are some interesting practical theological comments from a Christian source on confession and repentance. The comments are good, discussing the nature of forgiveness and confession.

“The Bible emphasizes the importance of confession in the life of believers. Here are some key verses and insights:

Confessing to God: The Bible teaches that we should confess our sins to God. In **1 John 1:9**, it says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” This act of confession allows us to experience God’s forgiveness and restoration, fostering a deeper relationship with Him.

Personal Healing: Confession not only brings about forgiveness but also leads to personal healing. When we acknowledge our sins and humbly ask for God’s mercy, we demonstrate our dependence on His grace (1 John 1:9).

Community and Support: Confessing our sins to other believers strengthens the communal bond among Christians. It creates an environment of support, understanding, and accountability. As **James 5:16** says, “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”

Mercy and Forgiveness: When we confess and renounce our sins, we find mercy. **Proverbs 28:13** states, “Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.”

In summary, confession allows believers to experience God’s forgiveness, fosters healing, and strengthens the bond within the Christian community. It is a vital aspect of our relationship with God and fellow believers

Confessing our sins to another person is not an absolute necessity for forgiveness. However, it can be **healing for relationships**.

James 5:16 encourages us to confess our sins to one another, leading to healing.

If we have wronged someone, it is essential to seek reconciliation with them before approaching God (Matthew 5:23-24).

Horizontal confession

Confession to others complements **vertical confession** (to God). We want both our relationship with God and our relationships with others to be clear and open.

Humility and Forgiveness

Asking for forgiveness from others should be done *face-to-face*. It is an act of humility and a way to teach us to forgive as well.

When we have been hurt, forgiving others is also crucial. It reflects our understanding of God’s forgiveness and helps maintain healthy relationships¹.

Confession, repentance, forgiveness are rooted in God’s Value

True repentance begins with recognizing the *sinfulness* of our actions, emotions, beliefs, or way of life.

It is not merely about fearing God’s retribution but in valuing God’s Christian system above our human systems.

Repentance is rooted in a high regard for God and His standards.

Remember that repentance is a process, which involves both our relationship with God and our interactions with others.”¹¹

Psalm 32. A Psalm of David

*A Maskil.*¹²

The psalmist is instructing and encouraging his community, based on his personal experience with God’s forgiveness on how to show true repentance before God for personal sin in the confidence that God’s love and mercy will initiate forgiveness.

“The psalm opens with words of thanks to God *for having forgiven sins* (verses 1–2), followed by the psalmist’s experience in the past, before and after he confessed his sins (verses 3–5). Next the psalmist praises God’s protecting care (verses 6–7) and relates how God had instructed him to submit to his will (verses 8–9). He concludes with a statement of the spiritual truth he learned in his experience (verse 10) and an exhortation for all to praise the Lord (verse 11).¹³

¹ *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.*

² *Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.*

[Note the aspect of personal pureness of spirit, no deceit, a genuine seeking for forgiveness.]

³ *When I declared not my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.*

⁴ *For day and night thy [God’s] hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. [Selah]*

⁵ *I acknowledged my sin to thee, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord;” then thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin. [Selah]*

⁶ *Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to thee; at a time of distress, in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him.*

⁷ *Thou art a hiding place for me, [demonstrating faith and confidence in God] thou preservest me from trouble; thou dost encompass me with deliverance. [Selah]*

⁸ *I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.*

⁹ *Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not keep with you.*

¹⁰ *Many are the pangs of the wicked;*

but steadfast love surrounds him who trusts in the Lord.

¹¹ ***Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous [the faithful believer in God and Torah], and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!”***

The Psalm demonstrates the importance of genuine faith and repentance for sin before God.

Psalm 38. The penitent’s plea for mercy

I have selected a few verses from this Psalm for comment, but the reader is encouraged to read the whole Biblical text, which is long but loaded with theological themes.

In the Psalm, the psalmist quite clearly *confesses his sinfulness and deep regret and repentance for his iniquity*. He is aware that he has sinned against God!

¹¹ Christian.net and other similar good practical Christian sources.

¹² *Maskil*, a Hebrew term of vague meaning. It could be a musical sign or a message of encouragement. Some see in the title the indication that the psalm was meant to instruct and encourage.

¹³ Bratcher and Reyburn, “*Psalms*,” p. 302.

¹ *O Lord, rebuke me not in thy anger,
nor chasten me in thy wrath!*
² *For thy arrows have sunk into me,
and thy hand has come down on me.* [The Psalmist is keenly aware of his sin!]
³ *There is no soundness in my flesh
because of thy indignation;
there is no health in my bones
because of my sin.*
⁴ *For my iniquities have gone over my head;
they weigh like a burden too heavy for me.”*

¹⁷ *For I am ready to fall,
and my pain is ever with me.*
¹⁸ *I confess my iniquity,
I am sorry for my sin.*
¹⁹ *Those who are my foes without cause are mighty, and many are those who hate me
wrongfully.*
²⁰ *Those who render me evil for good
are my adversaries because I follow after good.*
²¹ *Do not forsake me, O Lord!
O my God, be not far from me!*
²² *Make haste to help me,
O Lord, my salvation!*”

Bratcher and Reyburn

“This Psalm is listed among the *Lament Psalms*, but we should note that *Penitential Psalms* also fall under this category. We are uncertain what the psalmist’s sin may have been and indicate that following Jewish custom he may have attributed his illness to personal sin.

This lament is possibly by an individual suffering from some illness which he regards as punishment inflicted on him by God. So he confesses his sins and asks for God’s forgiveness. It is similar to the other psalms which were classified as penitential psalms by the early church (see introduction to Psa 32).

A psalm such as this one with 22 verses is no doubt modelled on an *alphabetic acrostic*. However, here the psalmist is free from such artificial restrictions.

The psalm opens with a cry for help (verse 1) and then proceeds to an extended description of the psalmist’s desperate physical and emotional condition (verses 2–10), which is made worse by the indifference of his friends and the hostility of his enemies (verses 11–12). The psalmist again refers to his pitiful condition (verses 13–14), affirms his faith in the Lord (verses 15–16), asks for forgiveness (verses 17–18), and once more denounces his enemies (verses 19–20). The psalm closes, as it opens, with a cry for help (verses 21–22).

There are no clues as to the author’s identity; some take the language here, as elsewhere, to represent the nation’s suffering, but it seems more likely that an individual is meant.”¹⁴

¹⁴ Bratcher and Reyburn, “*Psalms*,” p. 363.

Psalm 130. A prayer for forgiveness

Rayburn and Reyburn recognize the difficulty of setting this Psalm in history but observe that it reflects the natural prayer of a sinner for his fellow sinners, whomever they may be.

This psalm is also considered one of the Psalms of Ascent sung by pilgrims ascending up to Jerusalem and the Temple for one of the Jewish feasts and festivals.

“This psalm, which is *included among the seven Penitential* (Psalms see introduction to Psa 32), is *a cry of despair by an individual*. It is to be inferred from the language of verses 3–4 that the cause of his despair was sin—*his own and that of his people*. After expressing his despair (verses 1–4), the psalmist gives voice to his impatience as he waits for Yahweh’s help (verses 5–6). The psalm closes *with an exhortation for Israel to place its complete trust in Yahweh*, who will save his people (verses 7–8).

Nothing explicit can be determined as to the psalmist’s circumstances or the time of the writing of this psalm [but its superscript may throw some light on the purpose of the Psalm. The Hebrew Title is *a Song of Ascents* ...

Psalms 120–134 all have a title in the Hebrew text which is translated by rsv as *A Song of Ascents* ... The collection is also called “The Book of Pilgrim Songs.” The Hebrew word translated *Ascents* comes from the verb “to go up,” but other than this there is no agreement as to what the phrase means. Some take it to indicate the return of the Hebrew exiles from Babylonia; others take it to refer to a stylistic feature found in some of the psalms in which the order of the statement progresses in a step-like fashion from one verse to the other; *others take it to refer to the steps in the Temple precincts which led from one court to the other; the majority take it to refer to the ascent up the mountain on which the Temple was built* (Mount Moriah, known as Mount Zion). *Thus understood, these psalms are songs which the pilgrims sang as they came to Jerusalem for one of the three major annual festivals.*¹⁵

The Psalm manifests *penitence* for sin, but anticipation of the Lord’s *forgiveness* acknowledging *the steadfast love of the Lord*.

The Psalm is suitable for saints entering sacred space in the holy worship assembly, or even the sacred space of prayer and meditation with God.

Psalm 130 text

¹ ***Out of the depths I cry to thee, O Lord!***

² *Lord, hear my voice!*

Let thy ears be attentive

to the voice of my supplications!

³ *If thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities,*

Lord, who could stand?

⁴ ***But there is forgiveness with thee,***
that thou mayest be feared.

⁵ ***I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,***
and in his word I hope;

⁶ ***my soul waits for the Lord***
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.

⁷ ***O Israel, hope in the Lord!***

¹⁵ Bratcher and Reyburn, *Handbook on the Psalms*, pp. 1047, 1083.

*For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is plenteous redemption.
⁸ And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.*

Discussion thoughts

What does penitential mean? Explain how and when penitential thinking would be helpful.

When did Israel sing penitential psalms?

When would be a profitable time for you to reflect on one of the penitential psalms, as in Psalm 51?

At what major circumstance in our lives does a penitential psalm like Psalm 38 help our spiritual realization?

What crucial point does a penitential psalm tell us about our spiritual lives?

Why are penitential psalms important to our spiritual, emotional, and physical lives?

Chapter 5. Lament and Prayer Psalms for help. Psalms 13, 22, 25, 61

Psalm 13

Bratcher and Rayburn observe

“This psalm is a lament by an individual, which conforms perfectly to the model for such compositions: (1) a complaint to the Lord (verses 1–2); (2) a prayer for help (verses 3–4); and (3) an expression of confidence (verses 5–6).

The psalmist’s lament (verses 1–2) is reinforced by the repetition of *How long?* at the beginning of each of the four lines of the two verses, *thereby emphasizing his feeling of having been completely abandoned by Yahweh*. “For *How long*” see comments at 6:3. *How long* is not so much a question regarding the precise time the state of God’s silence will end, *but rather a plea that Yahweh break the long silence and reveal his power.*”¹

The understanding of this expression as reflected in the last sentence above has considerable meaning for the similar question opening Psalm 22:1, 2, the next Psalm we will study in this lesson!

¹“My God, my God, **why hast thou forsaken me?**

Why art thou so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

² O my God, I cry by day, but thou dost not answer; and by night, but find no rest.”

Psalm 13

¹ **How long, O Lord? Wilt thou forget me forever? How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?**

² **How long** must I bear pain in my soul,
and have sorrow in my heart all the day? **How long** shall my enemy be exalted over me?

³ Consider and answer me, O Lord my God;
lighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death;

⁴ lest my enemy say, “I have prevailed over him”;
lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.

⁵ **But I have trusted in thy steadfast love;**
my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation.

⁶ **I will sing to the Lord,**
because he has dealt bountifully with me.”

Psalm 22. The psalmist’s desperate cry for help

The first verses of this Psalm are well known by most Christians *since it introduced an astonishing cry of Jesus from the cross*, “My God, my God, **why hast thou forsaken me?**”

Unfortunately, this cry is taken out of context and misinterpreted by many Christians and inserted into the circumstances of God’s “*perceived denial of Jesus on the cross.*” It is claimed that *God forsook Jesus on the cross because Jesus purportedly became human sin on the cross.*

The question we must ask, “*is this what Jesus, Matthew, and Mark (Matt 27:46. Mk 15:34) meant by recording Jesus ambivalent cry, “Why have you forsaken me?”*”

“Did Jesus know the meaning and theology of Psalm 22? Surely he did!”

“Did Jesus or Matthew and Mark misinterpret Scripture and Psalm 22? **Surely not!**”

Unfortunately, *Christians almost never interpret this enigmatic saying of Jesus in the context of the Psalm itself!*

¹ Bratcher and Reyburn, “Psalms,” p. 122.

We should ask, “what was going on in the mind of the psalmist when he penned this psalm?”

This expression is most often *misinterpreted* by many evangelical commentators in the context of Jesus’ death, the context of human sin, and the vicarious atonement by Jesus for human sin, **but not in the context and theology of Psalm 22!**

One assumes that those making this claim think Jesus forgot the meaning of this psalm in its original context!

I am not questioning that Jesus died *for us and our sins*, and the enormity of the sacrificial self-offering is theologically mind challenging.

The sacrifice of Jesus for all men is the clear teaching of Scripture.

What we should be questioning is the doctrine *that in Jesus’ death God turned his back on Jesus, he forsook him, because he died vicariously for all men and became sin for us, hence God forsook him on the cross because of our sin.*

That God completely forsook Jesus because he became in himself sin. This is clearly not taught in Scripture!

Jesus took on the penalty of sin for us and died on the cross in our place, but in this God did not forsake Jesus!

In the agony of dying a cruel physical death on the cross Jesus called out to God for help and strength by quoting a psalm whose theology he clearly knew, Psalm 22.

Jesus knew all about the theology of the resurrection and had reminded Martha and Mary that in the death of Lazarus, John 11, Jesus’ faith and hope were revealed in the promise of a resurrection from the dead.

When Jesus died for our sins, vicariously in our place as a sinner, he did not go to hell, or the future home of sinners, and as a sinner suffer isolation from God for us! Luke records the words of Jesus from the cross **when he died. He committed his spirit to God, Luke 23:46**, “*Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.’ Having said this, he breathed his last!*”

What does that teach u?! *Jesus was protected by God and raised by the power of the Holy Spirit from the ultimate power and condemnation of sin, vicariously for us.*

Jesus knew the promise of a resurrection even better than we believe it!

Jesus knew the theology of Psalm 22 and the horror of a cruel death at the hands of his enemies.

Was Jesus afraid of the physical suffering of dying? *Surely he was*, and in his physical agony asked God not to forsake him *as the Psalmist did in the very psalm Jesus cited.*

Jesus’ experience in the garden of Gethsemane just before his betrayal must have pressed on his mind, not only theologically, but also humanly. He did not cease being human in the garden or on the cross!

Matt 26:36-56, “*Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, “Sit here, while I go over there and pray.”*³⁷ *And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled.*³⁸ *Then he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch^[a] with me.”*³⁹ *And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”*⁴⁰ *And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, “So, could you not watch with me one hour? ⁴¹ Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*⁴² *Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.”*⁴³ *And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.*⁴⁴ *So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again.*⁴⁵ *Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Sleep and take*

your rest later on.^[b] **See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.** ⁴⁶ Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.”

Psalm 22:1-5

¹ *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

Why art thou so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

² *O my God, I cry by day, but thou dost not answer; and by night, but find no rest.*

³ *Yet thou art holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.*

⁴ *In thee our fathers trusted; they trusted, and thou didst deliver them.*

⁵ *To thee they cried, and were saved; in thee they trusted, and were not disappointed.”*

Some comments on the word “forsaken” in the Psalms

First, we should note that *forsaken* is a common word and concept in the Psalms. It is found 19 times among the Psalms! It carries the sense of *being left alone* and *needing and pleading for help!*

Second, below are several Psalms that mention the word *forsake* in the sense of being *left alone*, or *an appeal for God’s continued help*.

Psalm 27:9

⁹ *Hide not thy face from me.*

*Turn not thy servant away in anger;
thou who hast been my help.*

*Cast me not off, forsake me not,
O God of my salvation!*

Psalm 37:25

²⁵ *I have been young, and now am old;
yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken
or his children begging bread.*

Psalm 37:28

²⁸ *For the Lord loves justice;
he will not forsake his saints.*

Psalm 94:14

¹⁴ *For the Lord will not forsake his people;
he will not abandon his heritage.*

In the Psalms the word *forsake* does **not** imply *total* or *complete* abandonment. *It expresses the feeling of the absence of God in their circumstances!*

Scholarly comments on the enigmatic citation of Psalm 22:1, 2 cited in the Gospel narratives

Note Donald Hagner’s abandonment of context in his commentary on Matt 27:46

Hagner addresses the challenging meaning and interpretation of Jesus’ cry and citation of Psalm 22:1, 2. Unfortunately, although Hagner is a good scholar and understands the meaning of exegesis which involves getting the meaning of a text *inductively* from the immediate context of the text, *he does what the Gospel writers do not do*, he mistakenly *deductively* reads into the text theological implications from other theological contexts recorded in different situations.

Hagner’s observations in his commentary indicate the contradiction between his evangelical persuasion and the theology of Jesus agony on the cross:

“The form of the words is one thing. *The meaning of the words in the mouth of Jesus, the Son of God, is something about which the reader and the exegete can only wonder.* It *may* fairly be said that it was whatever occurred here—this breach with his Father—and not the excruciating pain or ignominious death of crucifixion that Jesus dreaded more than anything else. *Jesus clearly felt abandoned (and is abandoned by God ... and articulates his feeling with words from Ps 22:1. **No doubt his heart took courage from the words of scripture for Ps 22 is not only a psalm of lament but simultaneously also a psalm of trust*** (thus rightly Gerhardsson; Reumann). The abandoned one, who still prays to his God, can also say of his ancestors: “To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame” (Ps 22:5; cf. 22:24). In no way, however, does this lessen the reality of present abandonment ... *The evangelists* (i.e., Mark and Matthew) *avoid interpretive comment on the words of Jesus, and although* other writers of the NT, whose task *is* interpretation, *never refer to the words*, it is not difficult to see the direct relevance of passages such as Rom 3:25; 2 Cor 5:21; Col 1:20; Heb 5:7–10; 7:27; 9:11–14. *Jesus as the sin-bearing sacrifice* (cf. 1:21; 20:28; 26:28) must endure the temporary abandonment of his Father, i.e., separation from God.”²

Thus, Hagner tends *to read into* Psalm 22 theological conclusions *which the Gospel writers and the Psalmists do not*, but which modern interpreters do by *forcing Jesus’ words into a meaning not necessarily implied in Psalm 22.*

The concept of a total abandonment is not found either in the Gospel texts, or in Psalm 22!

Bratcher and Reyburn have a sounder exegetical *inductive* understanding of Psalm 22 than does Hagner.

They reflect that ***Jesus’ gospel citation of Psalm 22:1, 2 must be kept in the theological context of Psalm 22, and not in an imposed evangelical theological scheme.***

Bratcher and Rayburn on Psalm 22:1 and the meaning of forsaken as gone far away

“*This psalm begins as a cry of despair by an individual who is sick and near death, the object of people’s scorn, not of their pity; it then becomes a song of praise to God for hearing and answering the psalmist’s cry. The first section (verses 1–21) may be divided into three parts, each of which contains a desperate plea for help, joined to an affirmation of faith and praise (verses 1–5, 6–11, 12–21). In the second section (verses 23–31) the psalmist promises to praise the Lord in public worship (verses 22–24), and to offer the Lord the sacrifices he had promised (verses 25–26); he ends by affirming the future universal dominion of the Lord (verses 27–31).*”³

Bratcher and Reyburn comment further on the psalm:

“In these two verses [of Psalm 22] the psalmist cries to God in despair because God does not answer him. The two anguished questions in verse 1 *dramatically express the psalmist’s desolation and hopelessness.* He cannot understand why God has abandoned him. But even in his suffering he still addresses God as *My God, my God, thereby affirming his own faith in and dependence on God, who seems so distant and silent. He feels that God has forsaken him (see similar expression in 10:1), that he does not pay any attention to his loud groans, to his cries of pain. Why hast thou forsaken me?* is often expressed as “*why have you left me?*” or “*why have you gone away from me?*”

² Donald Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, pp. 844-845. Hagner makes the mistake the gospel writers avoided of *reading into this text* other texts that refer to Jesus’ atoning work. This is a common mistake of those who approach the text in a proof-text deductive model of reading Scripture. He is correct in connecting the text of Matt 27:46 to the *positive theological context of hope and redemption.*

³ Bratcher and Reyburn, *Psalms*, p. 212.

In verse 1b, [the] RSV's literal rendering of the Hebrew makes for unnatural English since the prepositional phrase *from the words of my groaning* is governed by the verb phrase *Why art thou so far*. The line has been reordered in a more natural manner in TEV which provides a clear model for the translator. In some languages it may be necessary to make more explicit than does TEV that it is God whom the writer is calling to for help; for example, "*I have cried for you to help me, but you do not come to me.*" Should the translator wish to stay closer to the Hebrew form, however, something like the following may be said: "*Why do you remain so far away from me, and refuse to help me or even to listen to my anguished cries?*"⁴

Moving on to Psalm 22:3, Bratcher and Reyburn *introduce the positive side to the question* and the theological appeal of the psalmist.

"The initial word *Yet* serves to remind Yahweh, so to speak, that his silence, his failure to help the psalmist, *is not consistent with his past actions on behalf of his people*; or it may be the psalmist's way of reassuring himself: since Yahweh had helped in the past, he will do so now.

Even in his deepest despair the psalmist still trusts in God, the one who in the past has saved the people of Israel. Verse 3 is literally "But you are the Holy One sitting upon the praises of Israel," which is variously understood. As "the Holy One" God is the transcendent God, beyond his people, yet not indifferent to them, for he calls them to be his own people, completely dedicated to him; and so they also become holy in his sight. *Thou art holy* is often difficult in translation, since there are a number of things in the Scriptures which are called holy, and often the reference to God's holiness must be rendered in a different way. Places and objects which are said to be holy normally have reference to their quality of being set aside for special religious use. However, it is not possible to speak of God's holiness in a similar manner. It is possible to speak of God's holiness in reference to worship, and therefore to say, for example, "you are worthy of our worship," "you are the one people pray to," or "you are God, and we bow in prayer to you."⁵

The theological message of Psalm 22

Following Psalm 22:1-6, the remainder of the psalm *resonates with deliverance, salvation, hope, and prayer for help*.

Psalm 22:8 mocks those who make fun of the psalmist. *The psalmist follows this with praise for the personal deliverance of God*

⁸"*He committed his cause to the Lord; let him deliver him, let him rescue him, for he delights in him!*"

⁹*Yet thou art he who took me from the womb;
thou didst keep me safe upon my mother's breasts.*

¹⁰*Upon thee was I cast from my birth,
and since my mother bore me thou hast been my God.*

¹¹*Be not far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is none to help.*

¹²*Many bulls encompass me,
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;*

¹³*they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion."*

⁴ Bratcher and Reyburn, *Psalms*, p. 214.

⁵ Bratcher and Reyburn, *Psalms*, pp. 214–215.

Psalm 22:14 confesses personal weakness

*“¹⁴ I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax,
it is melted within my breast;
¹⁵ my strength is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue cleaves to my jaws;
thou dost lay me in the dust of death.*

*¹⁶ Yea, dogs are round about me;
a company of evildoers encircle me;
they have pierced my hands and feet—*

*¹⁷ I can count all my bones—
they stare and gloat over me;
¹⁸ they divide my garments among them,
and for my raiment they cast lots.*

*¹⁹ But thou, O Lord, be not far off!
O thou my help, hasten to my aid!*

*²⁰ Deliver my soul from the sword,
my life from the power of the dog!*

*²¹ Save me from the mouth of the lion,
my afflicted soul from the horns of the wild oxen!”*

Psalm 22:25-31. Many people will be helped by God’s help through the psalmist!

One has to be theologically blind by missing the Messianic theme in these verses.

Jesus surely was not theologically blind to the theology of this psalm!

*“²⁵ From thee comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.*

*²⁶ The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the Lord!
May your hearts live forever!*

*²⁷ All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the Lord;
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before him.*

*²⁸ For dominion belongs to the Lord,
and he rules over the nations.*

*²⁹ Yea, to him shall all the proud of the earth bow down;
before him shall bow all who go down to
the dust,
and he who cannot keep himself alive.*

*³⁰ Posterity shall serve him;
men shall tell of the Lord to the coming generation,*

*³¹ and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,
that he has wrought it.”*

Comments on Jesus' citation of Psalm 22

First, to see Psalm 22 as a Messianic *prophetic prediction of Jesus' suffering is a mistaken approach to midrashic use of the Old Testament by later persons such as the writers of the New Testament, or Jesus himself.*

Second, Jesus was not making a loaded theological soteriological statement on the cross! *He was pouring out his suffering in a prayer to his father, God, not to leave him alone without help, but to be present with him in his time of agony.* This is precisely what Psalm 22 expresses for the psalmist in his sense of suffering and need for help, and Jesus knew this Psalm "by heart"!

Third, to read soteriological implications into Psalm 22, or into Jesus' citation of the Psalm, *is to import soteriological theological themes not relevant to Psalm 22, nor the suffering of Jesus on the cross.*

My personal prayer Psalm/hymn for help

¹ *I am weak but Thou art strong;
Jesus, keep me from all wrong;
I will be satisfied as long
As I walk, let me walk close to Thee.*

Refrain:

*Just a closer walk with Thee,
Grant it, Jesus, is my plea,
Daily walking close to Thee,
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.*

² *Thro' this world of toil and snares,
If I falter, Lord, who cares?
Who with me my burden shares?
None but Thee, dear Lord, none but Thee.*

³ *When my feeble life is o'er,
Time for me will be no more;
Guide me gently, safely o'er
To Thy kingdom shore, to Thy shore."*⁶

Discussion questions or topics from this section of Psalms

What is the central theme of Psalm 22 and how have many missed this theme overall theme of the Psalm?

How do the psalmists understand and explain *forsaken* in the Psalms?

⁶ The lyrics of this beautiful hymn are anonymous, but the hymn is one of the favored songs for many Christians and is sung across the many denominations of Christianity.

Chapter 6. Praise Psalms.

Psalms 9, 18, 34, 100, 101, 103, 116, 138, 139

Praise Psalms appear in a mix of both personal and Community Psalms:

Personal Psalms: 9, 18, 32, 34, 138, 139

Community Psalms: 46-48, 66:8, 103

Psalm 9

In this psalm we see *David's personal struggles* reflected throughout his life as the king of Israel illustrating his faith in God's deliverance. *David praised God for his steadfast presence in his life.*

As a personal example I often reflect on my early years growing up in the small rural community and village, Ixopo, in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa, and how I eventually arrived in Abilene, Texas, with a Ph.D. degree in Theology, and the Administrative role of Dean of the College of Biblical Studies at Abilene Christian University!

In such sobering moments I reflect on how many times God "intervened" and inserted certain persons into my life that have proven to be life changing and enriching in my personal growth.

First, there were the circumstances that introduced me to the Pietermaritzburg Baptist Young People's Fellowship where I met Moira June Stent in 1948.

What a momentous and timely life-changing experience this proved to be! She has for over 75 years been the love and strength of my life, providing me with sobering vision and purpose. The life-shaping events we travelled together were no accident! I did not meet June by chance! God knew the trauma I had been experiencing in my early teenage years. God had a purpose for me which at the time I would never have perceived. My parents' serious marital relationships following World War II adjustments to rebuilding a marriage that had been torn apart by six years absence in military service in North Africa and Italy. I was very present during this troubling period. This caused me serious emotional anxiety, and personal instability.

Moira June was the kind of person I needed to bring stability into my life and personality, and God knew this. *The stable relationship of June and her parents* was the harbor of security I needed at a troubling period of my life.

Second, then in 1958 Robert H. Text Williams arrived in Pietermaritzburg! It was not by accident that he chose to be a missionary and move from Texas to Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, buy a house next to mine, and lead me to Scripture, to the Church, and Jesus. The amazing events that followed led to a new birth for me and June, not only a spiritual new birth which was real, but a radical change in lifestyle, career, and purpose. For one, as a Baptist, I did not like missionaries because they visited our church, preached, and made me feel inferior and guilty. But because of Tex Williams and Jesus, I became a missionary! The narrative of these amazing transformative events is well documented in my life's chronicles, *Memories out of Africa*.

Third, then came the move to Texas and Abilene Christian College in 1965. Of all places in the world, why Abilene, Texas? But in that move the Lord opened the door for me to begin working on a degree in bible under Drs Neil Lightfoot, J W Roberts, Abe Malherbe, and Bill Humble, and being hired by the South 11th and Willis Church of Christ as an evangelist getting to know Dub Orr who became a lifelong mentor to both me and June.

All of that because I made some smart decisions! ***Surely not!***

Fourth, then after receiving a Ph.D. in Theology from the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg, I was invited to join the Bible faculty at Abilene Christian University in 1978. Such an invitation was as rare an experience as any boy for Ixopo could dream. Subsequently, after a move from South Africa to

Texas in 1974 to become a professor of Bible at the prestigious Abilene University I was appointed in 1985 to become the first Dean of a newly formed College of Biblical Studies!

To assume that all of these remarkable incidents had occurred by accident, or because I was some brilliant character, is almost as irrational as the radical changes that took place in our lives.

David's reflections in Psalm 9 as King of Israel, after growing up as a shepherd boy, *reminds me that where I am today is because the hand of God was moving my life*, shaping me for a strange new role in the kingdom, and protecting me as I moved forward onto unknown territory!

Reflection on Psalm 9 challenges us to abandon pridefulness and remember our own human weakness and foolishness.

Psalm 9 includes *thanksgiving, praise singing, acknowledgement of God's sovereignty, acknowledgement of his righteous judgment, divine support and help, and praise for God's benevolent action to the poor and broken.*

The Psalms devotional thoughts can enrich our prayer life as we acknowledge and give vocal praise for all God has done for us in our lives and spiritual welfare.

Psalm 9 is very much my Psalm!

To the choirmaster: according to Muth-labben. A Psalm of David.

*“¹ I will give **thanks** to the Lord with my whole heart;
I will **tell of all thy wonderful deeds.***

*² I will be glad and **exult** in thee,
I will **sing praise** to thy name, O Most High.*

*³ When my enemies turned back,
they stumbled and perished before thee.*

*⁴ **For thou hast maintained my just cause;**
thou hast **sat on the throne** giving righteous judgment.*

⁵ Thou hast rebuked the nations, thou hast destroyed the wicked; thou hast blotted out their name for ever and ever.

*⁶ The enemy have vanished in everlasting ruins;
their cities thou hast rooted out;
the very memory of them has perished.*

*⁷ **But the Lord sits enthroned forever,**
he has established his throne for judgment;*

*⁸ and he judges the world with righteousness,
he judges the peoples with equity.*

*⁹ The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed,
a stronghold in times of trouble.*

*¹⁰ And those who know thy name [the nature of his person] put their trust in thee, **for thou, O Lord, hast not forsaken those who seek thee.***

*¹¹ Sing praises to the Lord, who dwells in **Zion!**
Tell among the peoples his deeds!*

[Zion is *literally* and *symbolically* Jerusalem from where David and Solomon reigned over Israel. *Spiritually*, it was from where Jesus and God reigned over the eschatological kingdom. *Metaphorically*, it is God's "place on earth" where the Lord abides. It is not so much a place as it is a symbol of God's presence and sovereignty.¹]

¹ Zion. This term also spelled *Sion* in KJV occurring over 150 times in the OT. It appears first as one of the names of the Jebusite fortress conquered by David. During subsequent biblical and postbiblical history, Zion was applied to other areas of Jerusalem and could be used as a designation of the entire city. Many theological motifs emphasize the city as the dwelling place of God. *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible.*

¹² For he who avenges blood is mindful of them;
he does not forget the cry of the afflicted.

¹³ **Be gracious to me, O Lord!** *Behold what I suffer from those who hate me, **O thou who liftest me up from the gates of death,*** ¹⁴ *that I may recount all thy praises, that in the gates of the daughter of Zion I may rejoice in thy deliverance.*

¹⁵ *The nations have sunk in the pit which they made; in the net which they hid has their own foot been caught.*

¹⁶ *The Lord has made himself known; he has executed judgment; the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands. [Higgaion. Selah]*

¹⁷ *The wicked shall depart to Sheol,
 all the nations that forget God.*

¹⁸ **For the needy shall not always be forgotten,**
and the hope of the poor shall not perish forever.

¹⁹ *Arise, O Lord! Let not man prevail;
 let the nations be judged before thee!*

²⁰ *Put them in fear, O Lord!
 Let the nations know that they are but men! [Selah]"*

PSALM 100

The life of the people God is *one of joyful thanks* to God for his *greatness and generosity*. Psalm 100 expresses this! God's people *approach God in prayer with joy and thanks for God's grace*. They *serve* God with *thanksgiving* for his *love and grace*. They sing psalms of praise loudly and joyfully!

A Psalm of thankful praise

¹ **Make a joyful noise**² [Sing loudly] to the Lord, all the lands!

² **Serve** the Lord with **gladness!**

Come into his presence with singing!

³ **Know that the Lord is God!**

It is **he that made us, and we are his;**
 we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

⁴ **Enter his gates with thanksgiving,**
 and **his courts with praise!**

Give thanks to him, **bless his name!**

Most often Zion refers to parts of the city of Jerusalem and its environs or the country of which the city is the capital. Frequently, Zion even represents the inhabitants of Jerusalem or the whole country. Sometimes physical features connected with Zion are stressed. The praise of God is to be made in the "gates" of the Daughter of Zion (Ps 9:14), that "stronghold" which has "watchtowers" (Mic 4:8)

The temple is therefore also called Zion, Mt. Zion, or the holy hill of Zion. The divine King of Israel is frequently spoken of as dwelling there. God, the Lord, is said to be enthroned in Zion (Ps 9:10); it (the temple) is his dwelling place (Ps 76:1), his holy hill (Joel 4:17, cf. the glory of God on the tabernacle, Exod 40:34). *The Lord Almighty is dwelling on Mt. Zion (Isa 8:18). God shines forth from Zion (Ps 50:2), the place where his Name dwells (Isa 18:7).* It is from Zion that a deliverer/redeemer will come forth (Rom 11:26a [= Isa 59:20a]). *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*

² Bratcher and Reyburn observe; "All people of the world are called upon to worship and *praise Yahweh with songs*. In verse 1a *Make a joyful noise* translates a verb which means "to shout" (see its use in 98:4a), and *so it may be preferable to translate "Sing loudly."*

⁵ For the Lord is good;
his **steadfast love endures forever**,
and his faithfulness to all generations.”

Psalm 138

¹ **I give thee thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing thy praise;**
² **I bow down toward thy holy temple**
and give thanks to thy name for thy steadfast love and thy faithfulness;
for thou hast exalted above everything
thy name and thy word.
³ **On the day I called, thou didst answer me,**
my strength of soul thou didst increase.
⁴ **All the kings of the earth shall praise thee, O Lord, for they have heard the words of thy mouth;**
⁵ **and they shall sing of the ways of the Lord,**
for great is the glory of the Lord.
⁶ **For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly; but the haughty he knows from afar.**
⁷ **Though I walk in the midst of trouble,**
thou dost preserve my life; thou dost stretch out thy hand against the wrath of my enemies, and thy
right hand delivers me.
⁸ **The Lord will fulfil his purpose for me;**
thy steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever.
Do not forsake the work of thy hands.”

David’s Psalms are largely *biographical*, reflecting on his personal struggles, and on God, the source of his strength.

Psalm 138:8 cited above, has a strong personal *biographical overtone for me and my understanding of God’s purpose in my life*. As mentioned earlier, God chose me for a mission, he sent a missionary to lead me to Scripture and his Word, he placed great people and mentors in my life, and has been my strength and comfort in my life and ministry.

I know who I am, who I belong to, and Psalms like this keep me focused and on a predestined track, and bring me back to where I should be.

Psalm 139

Psalm of David. Praise God for his omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, and unlimited power.

The Psalm has 24 verses clustered in four strophes or paragraphs which express two enigmatic yet seemingly contradicting themes, God’s omniscience and greatness, and God’s judgment on a world that has rejects his mercy.

Brueggemann addresses the challenging structure of the Psalm commenting on the change in poetic and thematic interest between vs 1-18 which praise God, and vs 19-24 which are more judgmental than the first half of the Psalm.

“The psalm’s opening confession of faith (v. 1) is reflected in its concluding petition (v. 23). Verses 1–18 consist of three units: YHWH’s searching the petitioner, being present to the speaker, and creating the speaker. Verses 17–18 bring this part of the psalm to a conclusion in summarizing fashion. Verses 19–24 come to the pressing matter of enemies and pray both for the destruction of these enemies and

that God will search the speaker's "heart." Our consideration of the psalm will now look at each unit of the text with attention to its powerful poetic style."³

¹ *O LORD, thou hast searched me and known me!*

² *Thou knowest when I sit down and when I rise up;
thou discernest my thoughts from afar.*

³ *Thou searchest out my path and my lying down,
and art acquainted with all my ways.*

⁴ *Even before a word is on my tongue,
lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.*

⁵ *Thou dost beset me behind and before,
and layest thy hand upon me.*

⁶ *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high, I cannot attain it.*

[God knows all about me! He knows my strengths and my weaknesses.]

⁷ *Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?*

Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?

[Think Jonah and the large fish!]

⁸ *If I ascend to heaven, thou art there!*

If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there!

⁹ *If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,*

¹⁰ *even there thy hand shall lead me,*

[Think Psalm 23, The Lord is my shepherd.]

and thy right hand shall hold me.

¹¹ *If I say, "Let only darkness cover me,
and the light about me be night,"*

¹² *even the darkness is not dark to thee,
the night is bright as the day;*

for darkness is as light with thee.

[God is omnipresent, he is everywhere. He is omniscient, he knows everything. He is able to take care of us and keep us safe.]

¹³ *For thou didst form my inward parts,*

thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ *I praise thee, for thou art fearful and wonderful.*

Wonderful are thy works!

Thou knowest me right well;

¹⁵ *my frame was not hidden from thee,*

when I was being made in secret,

intricately wrought in the depths of the earth.

¹⁶ *Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance;*

in thy book were written, every one of them,

the days that were formed for me,

when as yet there was none of them.

¹⁷ *How precious to me are thy thoughts, O God!*

³ Brueggemann, *Psalms*, p. 582.

How vast is the sum of them!

¹⁸ *If I would count them, they are more than the sand.*

When I awake, I am still with thee.

[God created everything, even me, with a purpose in mind. I must be about my destined purpose. Think Paul, Gal. 1:15ff; Jeremiah, 1:5f; Moses, Ex 2:1ff; Jesus as a boy in the Temple, "I must be in my father's business," Luke 2:41ff; Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane, "not my will but thine," Matt 24:26ff, Luke 22:39ff.]

¹⁹ *O that thou wouldst slay the wicked, O God,
and that men of blood would depart from me,*

²⁰ *men who maliciously defy thee,
who lift themselves up against thee for evil!*

²¹ ***Do I not hate them that hate thee, O LORD?***

And do I not loathe them that rise up against thee?

²² *I hate them with perfect hatred;*

I count them my enemies.

²³ ***Search me, O God, and know my heart!***

Try me and know my thoughts!

²⁴ *And see if there be any wicked way in me,*

and lead me in the way everlasting!

[David knows of God's judgment of evil people who oppose his good "everlasting works of salvation" by neglect or deliberately! He prays that God will lead him in His destined purpose.]

Discussion thoughts in these Praise Psalms

What practical value might singing or reciting these Psalms have?

What is the major focus of these Psalms?

How would these Psalms help you understand your purpose in life?

Select one of the Praise Psalms and explain its theme and possible impact on your life.

Can you name four Bible persons, two men and two women, who clearly understood their destiny.

Do you see yourself as a person of destiny, and what could or should that destiny be?

Chapter 7. Wisdom Psalms. Psalms 1, 8, 19, 111, 37, 49, 73, 112, 128, 133

The category of *Wisdom Psalms* is broad including some of the *Torah* and *Lament Psalms*. The concept of *Wisdom Psalms* is the same as that of *wisdom literature*—*hearing and responding to the wisdom of God revealed by his chosen servants and prophets*.

Wisdom Psalms extoll the virtue of praising and *hearing God in humility and meditating at his Torah word and instruction*.

J. Limburg on *Wisdom Psalms*

“Included here are Psalms 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128, 133, and Psalms 1, 19, and 119. One does not hear the tones of either lament or praise in the Wisdom Psalms; for the most part, the *Wisdom Psalms* are not even addressed to God. Rather, *they offer reflections on the possibilities and the problems of life before God and advice on how best to live that life*. In so doing, they are linked with the biblical Wisdom Literature (Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes). Wisdom Literature in the Biblical tradition is represented by two basic kinds of materials: *the short saying* (as found in Proverbs and Ecclesiasticus) and *the longer, reflective essay or drama* (Ecclesiastes, Job). Both types are represented in the psalms.

Psalms 127, 128, and 133 are each made up of *short sayings*, reflecting on such *everyday themes as piety and daily work* (127:1; 128:1–2), the *balance between work and rest* (127:2), and the *blessings of life together as a family* (127:3–5; 128) and as *a community of believers* (133).

Psalm 37 (an acrostic Psalm) presents the *thoughts of an older person* (v 25) to one who is discouraged because of the apparent triumphs of the wrongdoers.

Psalm 73 deals with the same theme, now in the words of one who had almost lost faith because of the prosperity of the wicked (vv 2–13); this psalm concludes with words of trust and praise addressed to God (vv 21–28).

Psalm 49 offers *a meditation* (v 3) *on wealth and wisdom*.

Psalm 112 is again acrostic, reflecting on the *blessings of those who fear the Lord and the emptiness of the lives of the wicked*.¹

“While it is accepted that prophets, priests, and wise men all functioned at the major sanctuaries, some overlap in their modes of expression is to be expected. Proverbial forms are not infrequently found in the psalms (Pss 37:5, 8, 16, 21, 22; 111:10; 127:1–5). *Psalm 1, probably an introduction to the whole Psalter, contrasts the diverging paths of the righteous and ungodly (cf. Ps 112), while Psalms 127 and 128 concentrate on the blessings which attend the godly*. Psalm 133 is written in praise of unity. The problem of explaining the sufferings of a righteous man and the apparent prosperity of evil men, dealt with in the wisdom literature in the Book of Job and in the prophets also (e.g., Jer 12:1–4), is taken up in Psalms 37; 49, and 73. The divine perspective, which a man may share in the sanctuary, and the preciousness of the fellowship which the godly enjoy with God, outweighing all other considerations, are the means by which the psalmist is lifted out of his depression in Psalm 73.

The historical psalms should be included in this category, since they underscore the lessons arising from the favored nation’s often bitter experience. *It is apparent that Israel delighted in the recital of salvation history*. The main psalms, and the periods covered are Psalm 78, from the exodus to the establishment of the Davidic monarchy (note the declared intention to teach in vv 1–4); Psalm 105, from

¹ Limburg, J. “Psalms,” *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5, pp. 533–534. I have edited the format of this article to facilitate the reading of each Psalm.

Abraham to the conquest of Canaan; Psalm 106, from Egypt to the judges; Psalm 136, from the creation to the Promised Land.²

Psalm 138

Psalm 138 is typical of the wisdom genre, repeating much of what Psalm 1 and 119 have also stated. The Psalm predicts a mixed *blessing on the person who fears and hears the Lord*.

¹ **Blessed**³ [Spiritually and physically rich, cf. Psalm 1] *is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways!*

² *You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be happy, and **it shall be well with you**.*

³ *Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table.*

⁴ *Lo, **thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord**.* [possibly looking back to vs 2-3, as well as toward vs 5-6]

⁵ ***The Lord bless you from Zion!**
May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life!*

⁶ *May you see your children's children!
Peace be upon Israel!"*

Psalm 1

Psalm 1 sets the tone for all of the wisdom and hymnody of the book of Psalm. Its thought is repeated in Psalm 119 and 138:

¹ **Blessed** [Spiritually rich] *is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;*
² *but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.*

Craige on the word and concept of blessed

"The solid foundation of the righteous (1:1-3). The righteous are introduced as the "blessed" or "happy" (see further H. Cazelles, *TDOT* I, 445-48). Their happy estate is not something given automatically by God, but is a direct result of their activity. A person can be happy, from a negative perspective, by avoiding the advice, the lifestyle, and the assembly of wicked persons (v 1). The three parallel lines of v 1 are poetically synonymous and thus all describe in slightly diverse ways the evil company which should be avoided by the righteous. Though the three lines, taken together, provide a full picture of what is to be avoided, it would be stretching the text beyond its natural meaning to see in these lines three distinct phases in the deterioration of a person's conduct and character (see further G. W. Anderson, *VT* 24 [1974] 231-33). The righteous person avoids all the dimensions of the way of the wicked; therein lies the source of blessedness or happiness.

But a person who is to be happy must also engage in a positive task, which is identified in v 2 as being related to the Torah. Although the term *Torah* can be used of the law, or of the Pentateuch, or even (at a later date) of the whole OT, its significance here is the most fundamental one. Basically, the word *Torah* means "instruction;" specifically, it is the instruction which God gives to mankind as a

² Limburg, "Psalms," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 2, p. 1803.

guide for life. Thus it may include that which is technically law, but it also includes other more general parts of God’s revelation. The Torah is to be a source of “delight” (see further the *Explanation*, below), a delight which is discovered by means of constant meditation on its meaning. Just as the king would learn to live a life of humility and righteousness through constant reflection on the meaning of Torah (Deut 17:18–20), so too could all mankind. And an understanding of Torah contributed to long life, peace, and prosperity (Prov 3:1–2), for in its words God has set down the nature of a life which would reach the true fulfillment for which it was created.

The happy estate of the righteous is illuminated in v 3 by the simile of the tree. A tree may flourish or fade, depending upon its location and access to water. A tree transplanted from some dry spot (e.g., a wadi, where the water runs only sporadically in the rainy season) to a location beside an irrigation channel, where water never ceases to flow, would inevitably flourish. It would become a green and fruitful tree. The simile not only illustrates colorfully the prosperity of the righteous, but also make a theological point. The state of blessedness or happiness is not a *reward*; rather, it is the result of a particular type of life. Just as a tree with a constant water supply *naturally* flourishes, so too the person who avoids evil and delights in Torah *naturally* prospers, for such a person is living within the guidelines set down by the Creator. Thus the prosperity of the righteous reflects the wisdom of a life lived according to the plan of the Giver of all life.⁴

³ ***He is like a tree
planted by streams of water,
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.***

⁴ *The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff which the wind drives away.
⁵ Therefore the wicked will 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 wicked will perish.***”

Psalm 8

This Psalm is so beautiful, majestic, and meaningful that it is found or reflected on in almost all Christian Hymnals praising God and encouraging worship.

The Psalm was so well known among the early Christians that the writer of the Hebrews incorporated it in his New Testament sermon, Heb 2:5-8, extolling the majesty and supremacy of Jesus Christ. His use of this Psalm is an excellent example of Jewish *midrashic* fulfillment, a form of *typological* fulfillment.

Everything about the majesty of the supreme nature of man evidenced in the creation of man in God’s creation is reflected in Psalm 8:5 is reflected in Heb 2:5-8. Jesus is the manifestation and fulfillment of everything God intended for man is expressed by the psalmist in his poem in Psalm 8.

The *mystery of Jesus*, was indicated when although he was a full member of the godhead [John 1:1-3; Col 1:19, 2:9; Heb 1:3]. This mystery became manifest when Jesus joined the human race in human form and thus became, as suggested in Psalm 8:5, a little lower than the angels yet with dominion over all creation.

⁴ Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, pp. 60–61.

The preacher, writing the sermon recorded in our book of Hebrews, Heb 2:5-8, focused back to Psalm 8, declaring the *majesty* of Jesus as the *power* of God's creation of everything.

The psalmist recognized the *majestic power* of creation in the beginning when God had intended man to be supreme over all creation, an immortalized it in his poetic psalm.

¹ *O Lord, our Lord,
how majestic is thy name in all the earth!
Thou whose glory above the heavens is chanted
² by the mouth of babes and infants,
thou hast founded a bulwark because of thy foes,
to still the enemy and the avenger.*

³ *When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon, and the stars which thou hast established;*

⁴ *what is man that thou art mindful of him,
and the son of man that thou dost care for him?*

⁵ *Yet thou hast made him little less than God,
and dost crown him with glory and honor.*

⁶ *Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet,
⁷ all sheep and oxen,*

and also the beasts of the field,

⁸ *the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the sea.*

⁹ *O Lord, our Lord,
how majestic is thy name in all the earth!"*

Since this is such a magnificent message of praise I am including a lengthy commentary of this text by Peter Craigie. I encourage the reading of the whole piece by Craigie.

"The interpretation of v 3 is rendered difficult by virtue of the uncertainty as to its proper translation (see v 3, note a, above). There is a contrast between "babes and sucklings," on the one hand, and the "foe and avenger" on the other; *between the contrasted parties is God* (v 3c). *God uses the mouth of "babes and sucklings," in some manner, to establish (his) "strength," on account of the presence, or existence, of enemies.* It is probable that the verse should be interpreted with specific reference to the divine "name" (v 2). *Enemies symbolize human strength; they are arrogant in their self-assertion. The essence of the enemies of God is that they do not recognize the name of God or the revelation that came through that name, for if they had come to such full recognition, they would have desisted from their enmity.* Babes, on the other hand, symbolize human weakness and humility, but they have a strength greater than that of God's enemies when they take the *name* of God on their lips; that is, in speaking the name, they acknowledge and in some sense understand the majesty and revelation of God which are implicit in that name. *Thus God may utilize the weak of this world, even the child, both to establish his strength, reflected in his nature and in his creation, and at the same time "to put at rest" (or quiet) the opposition of enemies.* Understood in this manner, v 3 sets the stage for what is to follow.

Though the universe is vast and imparts to mankind a sense of smallness and insignificance (vv 4–5), nevertheless God has given to mankind a position of extraordinary strength within the universe (vv 6–9). But that position of strength is not a natural human right (persons who think that are our enemies), but something God-given and God-revealed through the divine name. The psalmist, who will soon speak of the extraordinary honor and power bestowed upon mankind by God, first establishes in v 3 that it is not human arrogance that asserts such power, but the childlike recognition and enunciation of God's name.

Mankind's sense of insignificance (8:4–5). The spontaneous reaction of a human being, upon seeing the nighttime universe reflected in the stars and moon, is to become aware of his own insignificance. From a poetic perspective, the vastness of the universe is subtly magnified, for the heavens are the work of God's "fingers"! Though God does not have physical dimensions, the poet makes a striking point. *In contrast to God, the heavens are tiny*, pushed and prodded into shape by the divine digits; but in contrast to the heavens, which seem so vast in the human perception, it is mankind that is tiny. The response to this heavenly panorama is a response which so many humans have felt, whether or not they have encountered Ps 8. *In such a vast space, with dimensions beyond human comprehension, "what is man?"* (The expression "son of man," v 5b, is simply a poetic synonym of "man" in v 5a).

The question of v 5b is phrased in such a manner that it evokes from the person without revelation (the enemies of v 3?) the answer: Nothing! In such vastness, it is inconceivable that human beings have significance or meaning; it is inconceivable that God, if there is a God, could remember each human being or give attention to each person. *The poet deliberately creates this sense of despair, first, in order to make the positive answer to the question, when it comes (vv 6–9), all the more powerful.* From an objective perspective, human beings are but the tiniest fragments in a giant universe; it is not conceivable that they could have significance or a central position in that universe. But the name of God, through which revelation comes, indicates that the very opposite is true.

God's role for mankind (8:6–9). *God's role for mankind is that of master within the created universe; specifically, the mastery extends over living creatures within the universe. Thus mankind is only a "little less than God" (v 6a); as God, the Creator, is ultimate master, so has he delegated mastery to mankind, the creature. The early versions differ in their interpretations at this point. Many of the earliest versions took the word אֱלֹהִים (literally, "God, gods") to mean "angels" (so G, S, Tg. and Vg), and in some texts that would be an appropriate translation. But other versions (Aquila, Symmachus, and others) translated God. The translation angels may have been prompted by modesty, for it may have seemed rather extravagant to claim that mankind was only a little less than God. Nevertheless, the translation God is almost certainly correct, and the words probably contain an allusion to the image of God in mankind and the God-given role of dominion to be exercised by mankind within the created order.* This position is mankind's estate (the verb in v 6a implies a past accomplishment), yet the role is not static, but requires continuous human response and action: hence, "you will crown him with glory and honor" (v 6b).

Mankind's "original" mastery was to extend over all created things, but it is specifically living creatures that are singled out in vv 8–9. Both domestic and untamed creatures will fall beneath mankind's mastery, and both fish and birds will be set beneath his dominion. The reference to "whatever passes through the pathways of the sea" (v 9b) may simply be an all-embracing way of describing marine life, but it may indicate that even the monsters of the ocean (whales, or even mythological monsters), which were so much larger than tiny humans, were to fall under human control. The words are reminiscent of the ships and the monstrous Leviathan (Ps 104:25–26) that ply the waterways of the world.

Concluding praise (8:10). *The psalm concludes on the same note as that on which it began—the praise of God's "name," for it was the name and the revelation which came through the name that transformed mankind's sense of universal insignificance into an awareness of the divine and significant plan.*⁵

⁵ Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, vol. 19, pp. 107–109.

The preacher of Heb 2:5-8 drew on this psalm to demonstrate that although Jesus came in human form *he exemplified the divinely intended human oversight of God's magnificent creation* which God had intended in his first human creation—*Adam*.

At Heb 2:5 the preacher wrote

“⁵ For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. ⁶ It has been testified somewhere, [Psalm 8:4] what is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that thou carest for him?

⁷ Thou didst make him for a little while lower than the angels, thou hast crowned him with glory and honor,

⁸ putting everything in subjection under his feet.”

Now by putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control.

As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.

⁹ But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”

Discussion topics on the Wisdom Psalms

In your own words how would you define and understand the wisdom psalms, what is the heart of their message and what is to be gained in reading, reciting, and singing them?

Again in your own words describe the relationship between Psalm 8 and the preacher's use of this text in his sermon at Heb 1, 2. What kind of fulfillment do we find here?

Where does Psalm 1 fit into this story and what is the purpose of David's emphasis on the Law in his psalms? How do we understand the word Law?

How does Psalm 138 develop the theme of wisdom literature in regard to Psalms 19, 119?

How could the reading of a wisdom psalm enrich a group devotional or Bible study?

How would Matt 6:9-13 enrich, or be enriched, by reading it along with one of the wisdom psalms

Chapter 8: Royal Psalms. Psalm 2, 20, 110

Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary

The *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* explains that the royal psalms in our book of *Psalms* are primarily related to *David's reign as the King of Israel*.

“Royal Psalms are psalms *composed for an event connected with the life of the king*. Included are Psalms 2; 18; 20; 21; 45; 72; 89; 101; 110; 132; and 144:1–11. *Psalm 45 was written for a royal wedding. Psalm 2 was intended for a king's coronation*, a time when the vassal nations would be considering rebellion (vv 1–3). *Psalm 18 is a royal thanksgiving, in which the king expresses gratitude for a victory in battle* (vv 6–19, 31–45). Psalm 20 is a prayer for the king's victory before battle; Psalm 21 gives thanks for answered prayers (vv 1–7) and promises future victories (vv 8–12). Psalm 72 is a prayer for the king, probably at the time of his coronation or at its anniversary. Psalm 89 is a lament, a prayer for deliverance from enemies. In Psalm 101 the king promises to rule with loyalty and justice. Psalm 110 again fits a coronation setting. Psalm 132 recalls the divine choice of the Davidic line (vv 11–12, 17–18) and of Zion (vv 13–16). In Ps 110:1–4 the king prays for victory.

These psalms originated during the period of the Monarchy and functioned during that period. *After the fall of Jerusalem in 587 b.c., they took on another significance, projecting into the future a description of an ideal king to come.*¹

Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible

The *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* makes a key point that although the royal psalms were primarily understood as referring to the reign of David, *there was a strong eschatological messianic theme running through many of these psalms*.

“*Psalms Concerning the Davidic King*. In view of the prominence given to the king in the preceding section, it would be wise to consider next this group, often called the Royal Psalms. Psalms 2; 18; 20; 21; 45; 61; 72; 89; 101; 110; 132, and 144 are usually included. They do not form a literary category, since psalms of diverse types are included, but they all have some reference to the king, the nature of his rule, and his relationship to God. Since the Davidic monarchy was terminated in 586 bc, these psalms, almost certainly, were composed before that date. The language in these psalms could be interpreted in support of the view of sacral kingship noted earlier; for example, *Psalm 45 ... a royal marriage psalm, contains the assertion “Your divine throne endures for ever and ever” (45:6). But this is best understood in terms of the throne being regarded as the Lord's, occupied by the king as his representative*. Similarly Psalm 2:7, “You are my Son,” probably implies no more than a sonship by adoption, while Psalm 110:1, “Sit at my right hand,” indicates the privileges and prerogatives which the king enjoys as God's vice-regent. The balance of the OT evidence concerning the king shows that the monarchy in Israel was qualified by the nature of God's covenantal relationship with his people; the king did not enjoy the absolutism claimed by most of the rulers of surrounding kingdoms.

Nevertheless, the king *did* play a vital role; indeed, there is convincing evidence to suggest that the Sinaitic covenant was subordinate to the Davidic covenant during the dynasty of the Davidic kings. The blessings of God's rule were mediated *through* his reigning representative. Psalm 72, for instance, which may have been composed as a coronation oracle, speaks of the benefits resulting from that righteous government which adequately reflects the role of God. This placed great responsibility upon the kings, who, with few exceptions, sadly disappointed the hopes of the pious in Israel.

But the underlying hope itself persisted, being projected into the future, and thus forming the basis of the Messianic hope, a remarkable feature of Israel's history. The monarchy, which was a brief

¹ Limburg, “Psalms,” *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5, p. 533.

interlude (1020? bc–586 bc) and which ultimately was a failure, *nevertheless gave definition to the imperishable hope that God's righteous rule would ultimately be established through the man of his choice*. Indeed, the word *Messiah*, meaning “anointed,” has often been limited to the promises which link directly with the Davidic king. A broader interpretation is desirable, including all references which foreshadow Christ in the fourfold aspect of his mission, King, Prophet, Priest, and Servant. *However, most of the so-called Royal Psalms could be re-categorized Messianic Psalms and were interpreted as such in the early Christian church, as witnessed in Christ's general statement that the psalmists wrote of him (Lk 24:44) and by particular NT quotations*. The main psalms concerned, and the NT references are Psalm 2, Psalm 45, Psalm 110, and Psalm 132.”²

Psalm 2

From our New Testament studies we see that his psalm has strong *messianic prophetic implications*. The point is to recognize how the references in the New Testament to this Psalm are used by the various New Testament writers *midrashically* to argue that *Jesus was the fulfillment of all messianic prophecies*.

¹ *Why do the nations conspire,
and the people plot in vain?*

² *The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together, Acts 4:25, 26
against the Lord and his anointed, saying,*

³ *“Let us burst their bonds asunder,
and cast their cords from us.”*

⁴ *He who sits in the heavens laughs;
the Lord has them in derision.*

⁵ *Then he will speak to them in his wrath,
and terrify them in his fury, saying,*

⁶ *“I have set my king
on Zion, my holy hill.”*

⁷ *I will tell of the decree of the Lord:
He said to me, “You are my son,
today I have begotten you.*

[This text is used at Acts 13:33 and Heb 1:5 to argue that Jesus is the Messiah, it is a *midrashic*³ messianic fulfillment of and Old Testament statement by God regarding his king, arguing that Jesus falls within God's messianic scheme.]

⁸ *Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.*

⁹ *You shall break them with a rod of iron,
and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.”*

[This theme of the sovereign power of God's son and king is picked up in Revelation referring to the sovereignty of Jesus as the King of kings and Lord of lords. The relevance of this statement regarding Jesus is seen in the challenge of faith and persecution created by Imperialist Rome. Jews aware of David's psalm and often threatened situation and sovereignty was not lost on the 1st century church and Christians.

Rev 2:27, “He who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, I will give him power over the nations,²⁷ and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received power from my Father;²⁸ and I will give him the morning star.²⁹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Rev 12:5, “she brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne.”

Revelation 2:27 and Rev 12:5 are classic examples of *Midrashic* interpretation or application of an early OT, *Tanakh* text, Psalm 2:8, 9. Revelation draws on the power of King David's sovereignty in the application to Roman Imperial and Jewish opposition to the church.]

¹⁰ *Now therefore, O kings, be wise;*

² Elwell and Beitzel, “Psalms,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 2, pp. 1800–1801.

³ *Midrash* and *midrashic* refer to a Hebrew technical style of using and Old Testament (*Tanakh*) text to make a point demonstrating a theological point that in the New Testament is in keeping with God's style and eschatological purpose.

be warned, O rulers of the earth.

*¹¹ Serve the Lord with fear,
with trembling ¹² kiss his feet,
lest he be angry, and you perish in the way;
for his wrath is quickly kindled.*

Blessed are all who take refuge in him.”

Psalm 20

A Psalm celebrating victory

The psalmist offers a prayer for God’s help for the king in battle. Bratcher and Reyburn observe: “This psalm, a prayer for victory in battle, appears to have been composed for use at the time a sacrifice was offered before battle. Oesterley calls it unique in the Psalter. It is classified as a royal psalm (see Psa 2; 18), since it is clear that the one going into battle is the king. In the first part (verses 1–5) the psalmist (or else the congregation) in the Temple asks the Lord to give the king victory in battle; in the second part (verses 6–8) the king (or a prophet, or a priest) affirms his confident belief that the Lord will be with the king and give him victory; the psalm closes (verse 9) with a repetition of the request, by the priests.”⁴

“¹ The Lord answer you on the day of trouble!

The name of the God of Jacob protects you!

***² May he send you help from the sanctuary,
and give you support from Zion!***

***³ May he remember all your offerings,
and regard with favor your burnt sacrifices!***

[Selah – a musical direction]

***⁴ May he grant you your heart’s desire,
and fulfil all your plans!***

***⁵ May we shout for joy over your victory,
and in the name of our God set up our banners!***

May the Lord fulfil all your petitions!

Assurance of divine help

⁶ Now I know that the Lord will help his anointed;

[His anointed king of Israel] he will answer him from his holy heaven with mighty victories by his right hand.

***⁷ Some boast of chariots, and some of horses;
but we boast of the name of the Lord our God.***

***⁸ They will collapse and fall;
but we shall rise and stand upright.***

***⁹ Give victory to the king, O Lord;
answer us when we call.”***

Psalm 110

Bratcher and Reyburn

A Royal Messianic Psalm

⁴ Bratcher and Reyburn, “Psalms,” p. 197.

“This royal psalm, like Psalm 2, was *composed to celebrate the enthronement of a king, who is chosen by Yahweh* and is promised victory over his enemies.

There is much disagreement concerning the time of its composition, with opinions ranging from the tenth century b.c. to the Maccabean age, in the second century b.c. By and large modern scholarship tends to regard it as an ancient composition; Anderson says that it “may well be one of the oldest poems in the Psalter” (see also Dahood, McCullough, Weiser).

By the time of Jesus the Psalm was interpreted as referring to the Messiah; it is clear from the passages in the Gospels (Matt 22:41–46; Mark 12:35–37; Luke 20:41–44) that Jesus’ hearers agreed with him that the psalm spoke of the Messiah. In the New Testament this psalm (verses 1, 4) is applied to Christ and is quoted more often than any other Old Testament passage.⁵

¹ *The Lord says to my lord:*

“Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool.”

[Peter interpreted Psalm 1 as referring to Jesus. He understood it as a proof of Jesus Messiahship, Acts 2:34.]

² *The Lord sends forth from Zion*

your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your foes!

[When discussing the theology of the resurrection Paul used the statement of Ps 110:2 as a reference to Jesus’ kingship and rule over death. 1 Cor 15:25, 26.]

³ *Your people will offer themselves freely*

on the day you lead your host

upon the holy mountains.

From the womb of the morning

like dew your youth will come to you.

⁴ *The Lord has sworn*

and will not change his mind,

“You are a priest for ever

after the order of Melchizedek.”

[The preacher of Hebrews refers to Psalm 110:2 as a proof that Jesus was God’s messianic king, Heb 5:5, 6, 10, 6:20, 7:11, 15, 21.]

⁵ *The Lord is at your right hand;*

he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath.

⁶ *He will execute judgment among the nations, filling them with corpses; he will shatter chiefs over the wide earth.*

[Again John refers to this Psalm and Psalm 2:1 midrashically as a proof of Jesus’ royal messianic kingship, Rev 11:17, 18.]

⁷ *He will drink from the brook by the way;*

therefore he will lift up his head.”

⁵ Bratcher and Reyburn, “Psalms,” p. 947.

Chapter 9. Messianic Psalms. Psalms 2, 45, 110

Closely allied to the royal Psalms we have a group of psalms which at least by the time of the Christian era came to be viewed as Messianic Psalms.

Elwell and Beitzel observe that *underlying the Royal Psalms lay the hope of a future king who would establish a Davidic Messianic kingdom in fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy of an eternal kingdom, Dan 7:11-27.*

“But the underlying hope itself persisted, being projected into the future, and thus forming the basis of the Messianic hope, a remarkable feature of Israel's history. The monarchy, which was a brief interlude (1020? bc–586 bc) and which ultimately was a failure, nevertheless gave definition to the imperishable hope that God's righteous rule would ultimately be established through the man of his choice. Indeed, the word *Messiah*, meaning “anointed,” has often been limited to the promises which link directly with the Davidic king. A broader interpretation is desirable, including all references which foreshadow Christ in the fourfold aspect of his mission, King, Prophet, Priest, and Servant. *However, most of the so-called Royal Psalms could be re-categorized Messianic Psalms and were interpreted as such in the early Christian church, as witnessed in Christ's general statement that the psalmists wrote of him (Lk 24:44) and by particular NT quotations.* The main psalms concerned, and the NT references are:

Psalm 2 (Acts 13:33; Heb 1:5; 5:5), while linked with the Davidic king, nevertheless *speaks of a universal vindication and rule (8; 9) which far transcended even David's rule.* Further, the picture of the Davidic king, anointed (2) to rule on the earth as the representative of God who is enthroned in heaven (4), *strongly suggests Christ's mediating, incarnate ministry.*

Psalm 45 (Heb 1:8, 9), a marriage psalm for one of the Davidic kings, possibly Solomon, speaks not only of a *permanence and quality* of rule, but in the most obvious translation of verse 6, addresses him, “*Your divine throne, endures for ever and ever.*” The writer to the Hebrews clearly accepted this [*messianic*] interpretation and used it in contradistinction to the exalted status of even the angels, reinforcing it with two other quotations from the psalms which originally applied to God, Ps 97:7; 102:25–27; cf. Heb 1:6, 10–12.

Psalm 110 (Mt 22:43–45; Acts 2:34, 35; Heb 1:13; 5:5–10; 6:20; 7:21) *is the most frequently quoted messianic psalm.* The language, speaking of the privileges, universal victory and *continuing priesthood of David and his successors*, would be considered hyperbolic and possibly misleading but for its fulfillment in “great David's greater Son.” In contrast to the angels who are privileged to stand in God's presence (Lk 1:19), *Christ the Son sits in the place of power and authority (Heb 1:13).¹*

Comments on these Messianic/Royal Psalms

The categories Royal and Messianic in the context of Judaism and Christianity are closely interrelated and historically progressively take on additional flavors.

In the early years of the Jewish monarchy the Royal Psalms are related primarily to the king that was ruling over Israel, Saul, David, Solomon, and their wayward sovereign “descendants.”

We discussed Psalms 2, 45, 110 above under the category of Royal Psalms. We now comment on their progression into the category of Messianic Psalms.

During the years of the religious crumbling of the two kingdoms, Israel, and Judea, and then during the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian exiles, as in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, certain “Davidic” Psalms were read with a futuristic flavor, predicting a future Davidic king who would establish an eternal global king and kingdom over all nations.

¹ Elwell and Beitzel, “Psalms,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 2, p. 1801.

Finally, they took on a messianic fulfillment note establishing in the Christian age a fulfillment of God's Messianic kingdom in Jesus. In this manner, some Royal Psalms were read as Messianic Psalms, hence our listing Psalm 2, 45, and 110 as Messianic Psalms.

The Royal Psalms were *midrashically* read by both Jews and Christians as *proof of Messianic fulfillment*.

Discussion thoughts

What do we mean by *messianic* fulfillment?

Daniel prophesied an *everlasting kingdom* to be fulfilled by a future *prince* or *messianic* person. Jesus came preaching a kingdom gospel claiming later that in his ministry and through the Holy Spirit that kingdom had come. Matt 4:23; Matt 13; Matt 12:28f; Acts 1:3.

How does Matt 6:10 fit into this discussion?

What do we mean when we speak of an *eschatological kingdom* or *age*? Acts 2:16f; Heb 1:1-3. The Greek word behind the English terms *eschatological* and *last days* in these texts refers to the *last days* or *final days before the end of the Christian or messianic age*.

Why would prophecies about God's, David's, Jesus,' or Israel's future kingdom be referred to as a *messianic* or *eschatological* kingdom Psalms?

What can *messianic* Psalms contribute to our spiritual richness? Be practical! What is Jesus telling us in the messianic Psalms?

Chapter 10. Communal Worship. Psalms 15, 24, 50, 68, 81, (82), 95, 115, 132, 136

Limburg discusses a cluster of Psalms that over time became worship liturgies, at least in Jerusalem

They may have been sung on other occasions in community worship as in the Synagogue or homes.

Psalms designed for *antiphonal* dialogue, or which associate liturgical action with the words of the psalm are called *Liturgies*, psalms designed for community worship and reference. Here we may include Psalms 15, 24, 50, 68, 81, 95, 115, 132.

“Psalm 15 appears to have functioned as a liturgy for entrance into the temple area, with the worshipper asking the question in v 1, “O Lord, who shall sojourn in thy tent?” and the priest responding with the answer in vv 2–5, “He who walks blamelessly, and does what is right ...”

Psalm 24 is similar, with the worshipper’s question in v 3, “Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?” and the answer in vv 4–6, “He who has clean hands and a pure heart ...” Like Psalm 48, this psalm appears to be associated with a procession, probably including the ark. Those outside the temple area make the request, “Lift up your heads, O gates ... that the King of glory may come in.” Those inside respond with the question, “Who is this King of glory?” and the first group replies, “The Lord, strong and mighty ...” (vv 7–8). The same exchange is then repeated in vv 9–10.

Three psalms include extensive words from the Lord delivered in liturgical settings.

Psalm 50 assumes a ceremony renewing the covenant (vv 5, 16). After a description announcing God’s presence, including a word from God delivered by a cultic official gathering the covenant people (v 5), there are further words from God calling for genuine prayer and thanksgiving, instead of a mechanical offering of sacrifices (vv 7–15, 16b–23). The ceremony must have included a recitation of the covenant requirements (as v 16 suggests). Ps 81:1–3 is suited to a worship setting on a “feast day.” The main part of the psalm consists of words from the Lord delivered by the proper official, here reminding Israel what the Lord has done (vv 6–7, 10a), recalling their past disobedience (vv 11–12), and calling for new loyalty and obedience (vv 9, 13).

Psalm 95 appears to be connected with a procession (vv 1–2) which culminates in bowing before the Lord (v 6). Once again, a divine word spoken by a cultic official calls for obedience (7b–11).

Psalm 68 refers to “solemn processions,” described in vv 24–27, while Psalm 82 depicts a legal process where God pronounces judgment on the gods making up the “divine council.”

Psalm 115 assumes a variety of voices. One voice (or group) asks the question in vv 1–2, and other answers with vv 3–8; three groups are exhorted and then respond in vv 9–11; the psalm concludes with a word of blessing (14–15) and praise (16–18).

Psalm 118 appears to have been connected with a ceremony entering into the temple area (vv 19–20, 26–27). Psalm 132 may have been used in connection with a procession reenacting David’s bringing of the ark (v 8) to Jerusalem and thus celebrating the Lord’s choice of David (v 11; cf. the Royal Psalms) and of Zion (v 13; cf. the Songs of Zion).

Psalm 121 as one of the “Pilgrimage Psalms” appears to have been used as a liturgy for travelers, with those going on a journey reciting vv 1–2 and those remaining at home speaking the words of encouragement and blessing in vv 3–8.”¹

¹ Limburg, “Psalms,” *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5, p. 533.

Thoughts on some of these Psalms

Psalm 15

“A Psalm of David.

¹ *O Lord, who shall sojourn in thy tent?*

[You might remember that this Psalm, and the following Psalms in this section, were *antiphonal*, one group or a leader asks a question, the other group responds positively.]

Question:

“¹ Who shall dwell on thy holy hill?”

[Comment: “Who should, or can worship God? – The answer, read verse 2!]

Response:

*“² He who walks blamelessly, and does what is right,
and speaks truth from his heart;*

*³ who does not slander with his tongue,
and does no evil to his friend,*

nor takes up a reproach against his neighbor;

⁴ in whose eyes a reprobate is despised,

but who honors those who fear the Lord;

who swears to his own hurt and does not change;

⁵ who does not put out his money at interest,

and does not take a bribe against the innocent.

He who does these things shall never be moved.”

[In other words, He who treasures the *Torah*, the *instruction of God*, and keeps his word and instruction, will remain safe with God. This both a personal and community encouragement and instruction.]

Psalm 115

[This Psalm assumes a *variety of voices*. One voice (or group) asks the question in vv 1–2, and other answers with vv 3–8; three groups are exhorted and then respond in vv 9–11; the psalm concludes with a word of blessing (14–15) and praise (16–18).]

Voice one:

“¹ Not to us, O Lord, not to us,

but to thy name give glory,

for the sake of thy steadfast love and thy faithfulness!

² Why should the nations say,

“Where is their God?”

Response one

³ Our God is in the heavens;

he does whatever he pleases.

⁴ Their idols are silver and gold,

the work of men’s hands.

⁵ They have mouths, but do not speak;

eyes, but do not see.

⁶ They have ears, but do not hear;

noses, but do not smell.

⁷ They have hands, but do not feel;

feet, but do not walk;

and they do not make a sound in their throat.

⁸ Those who make them are like them;

so are all who trust in them.

Voice two:

⁹ O Israel, trust in the Lord!

He is their help and their shield.

¹⁰ *O house of Aaron, put your trust in the Lord!*

He is their help and their shield.

¹¹ *You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord!*

He is their help and their shield.

¹² *The Lord has been mindful of us; he will bless us;*

he will bless the house of Israel;

he will bless the house of Aaron;

¹³ *he will bless those who fear the Lord,*

both small and great.

Closing response-blessing:

¹⁴ *May the Lord give you increase,
you and your children!*

¹⁵ *May you be blessed by the Lord,
who made heaven and earth!*

Closing response-praise:

¹⁶ *The heavens are the Lord's heavens,
but the earth he has given to the sons of men.*

¹⁷ *The dead do not praise the Lord,
nor do any that go down into silence.*

¹⁸ ***But we will bless the Lord
from this time forth and for evermore.***

Praise the Lord!"

Psalm 136

The steadfast love of the Lord

[This Psalm is a long *acrostic antiphonal* hymn! It repeats the praise of *the steadfast love of the Lord* at the end of each stanza. For convenience, I include only the first 9 verses, but the reader is encouraged to read the whole Psalm.

This is obviously a Psalm *praising God for his steadfast love which endures forever!*

It is sung *antiphonally* with a "cantor" leading the singing, and the assembly responding!]

“¹ O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever.
² O give thanks to the God of gods,
for his steadfast love endures forever.
³ O give thanks to the Lord of lords,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
⁴ to him who alone does great wonders,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
⁵ to him who by understanding made the heavens,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
⁶ to him who spread out the earth upon the waters,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
⁷ to him who made the great lights,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
⁸ the sun to rule over the day,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
⁹ the moon and stars to rule over the night,
for his steadfast love endures forever;"

[The expression “*the steadfast love endures forever*” appears 242 times in the Old Testament. *It is our English translation of the Hebrew word “hesed.” This word primarily describes God’s love toward us, and his mercy, but it is also used to describe our love for each other.*

In the Psalms this expression of love occurs 120 times, emphasizing God’s loving kindness, faithfulness, and mercy. One notable example is this Psalm 136 in which it appears 26 times and where it is part of a refrain: “*for His steadfast love endures forever.*”

Additionally, Psalm 89 pairs “*steadfast love*” with *faithfulness, highlighting God’s unwavering commitment to His people.* The repetition of this term underscores its significance and reassures us of God’s unchanging nature.² The expression *the steadfast love of the Lord* appears in several OT texts.

Lam 3:21-25

²¹ *But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:
²² The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
²³ they are new every morning;
great is thy faithfulness.
²⁴ “The LORD is my portion,” says my soul,
“therefore I will hope in him.”
²⁵ The LORD is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul that seeks him.”*

Exod 34:6

⁶ *The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”*

Ex34:7

The interesting double use of the name of the Lord, *Jehovah, Yahweh*, has gendered some interesting comments. In the mind of some the doubling of the name was the result of *cultic, religious practice usage*, possibly for emphasis that the Lord, *Jehovah*, is a god of *hesed, compassion, mercy, and steadfast love*, as discussed by Durham below.

Ex 34: 6–7

“The confession that follows the double calling of Yahweh’s name is clearly reflected in eight OT passages, three of them in the Psalms (86:15; 103:8; 145:8) and one each in Num 14:18; Joel 2:13; Nah 1:3; Neh 9:17; and Jonah 4:2 ... The description of Yahweh set forth here is an apt one *for the narrative of Israel’s first disobedience and Yahweh’s judgment. Yahweh’s compassion had just been demonstrated (32:14), and his tendency to be favorable was in the process of exercise (33:12–17). His slowness to grow angry had been attested from the moment of Israel’s complaint at the sea (14:11–12), and his unchanging love and liableness were the reason Moses had still been able to plead after the terrible cancellation made by the people’s disobedience with the calf. His keeping of unchanging love to the thousands and the removal of their guilt, their transgression and their sin (the multiplication of terms is a deliberate attempt at comprehensive statement) were in process.* And his serious view of obligation and commitment was the very basis of the crisis provoked by the worship of the calf and the reason that Israel’s fate had hung so precariously in the balance.”³

² *Steadfast Love of the Lord in the Bible.* <https://www.bing.com>.

³ Durham, J. I., *Exodus*, Word Incorporated, vol. 3, p. 454, 1987.

Deut 7:12

*“¹²And because you hearken to these ordinances, and keep and do them, **the LORD your God will keep with you the covenant and the steadfast love which he swore to your fathers to keep.**”*

Num 14:18

*“¹⁸ **The LORD is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of fathers upon children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation.**’ ¹⁹ **Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray thee, according to the greatness of thy steadfast love, and according as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.**”*

Phillip Budd on the word *hesed*,

“Hesed means “slow to anger and totally faithful.” The idea is often rendered “steadfast love.” Notions of “loyalty” and “reliable commitment” are integral to the word in many OT contexts... “forgiving iniquity” ... probably means the taking away of the punishment sin deserves. The root means “to lift up,” and the idea of the carrying away of sin seems integral.”⁴

Dr. Tom Olbricht’s Seminal Book, “*He Loves Forever*”

Reviewer’s comment

“Do you know - really know - how much God loves you? Is the knowledge of God's love for you just another fact stored in your brain or, is your understanding of God's love so predominant in your life that your every perspective or attitude throughout any given day is influenced by it?

The central focus of the Old Testament is God's love! The book *He Loves Forever* is written in an easy to read and well-documented style, Dr. Thomas Olbricht has provided us with an *inspiring look at the steadfast, immeasurable love God has for His children. He Lives Forever* traces the *intense love God has for us* through Creation, Blessings through Abraham, deliverance by Moses in the Exodus, protection in the Wilderness, promises of a Messianic future, through the covenants of Love, the Law, victory in the Conquest of Canaan, inheritance of the Land, through the Psalms, Proverbs, and the Prophets.

As Dr. Olbricht writes, *“the story line of the Old Testament is easier to follow if one is familiar with the basic contours.*

This book is designed to identify certain foundational affirmations in the Old Testament and to trace the threads, *which bind the whole together.*

*We are concerned with the central message of the Old Testament - **that the God of the Old Testament is an incessant lover.** “O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever*

⁴ Budd, P. J., *Numbers*, Word, Incorporated, 1984, vol. 5, p. 158.

Chapter 11. Some practical remarks for devotional meditation

First, have a carefully worked out plan for the study, providing time for reflection, meditation, note taking—this facilitates memory, and prayer time.

Second, the Psalms are *deeply spiritual* and *religious wisdom* literature *guiding* both the individual and the community *in deep spiritual reflection*. Reflect on and discuss the spiritual emphases of the Psalms and how these could impact our life.

Third, the Psalms involve both *psychological* and *spiritual reflection and meditation*. They reflect both the individual's or the community's *emotional situation* in an *outpouring of praise, blessing, and plea* to God for his continued blessing. Discuss life situations in which you can find spiritual and psychological help, and in which the Holy Spirit can work.

Fourth, although the Psalms reflect deep community opportunities for the enriching worship of God, they provide the individual *seeker for God's guidance, assistance, forgiveness, and blessing* as an excellent guide and formula for deep personal reflection.

Fifth, *quiet meditation, personal reading of the Psalms, and prayer* are the best practices for appreciation of the Psalms.

Sixth, a "hectic" *over-active environment* and *deep rational approach* are not the best environment for Psalm reflection.

Seventh, plan the meditative and prayer session carefully, approaching one Psalm at a time, *read the Psalm deliberately, praying for the Spirit's guidance*, meditating on how one may be enriched by the Psalm's message and theology, *seek for theological principles ensconced in the Psalm, and deliberate on practical ways in which the Psalm's message may be relevant*.