

## The Psalms

The book of Psalms is a collection of hymns inspired by the Holy Spirit. The unique part of this is that rather than the Psalms being like a letter written to us (as in the New Testament epistles), they represent the feelings of men

poured out to God. Even so, they were considered inspired by the Holy Spirit. For example, when Jesus referred to Psalm 110, He said that David said what he did “in the Spirit” (Matt. 22:41-44). When the apostles had been threatened and came back to pray with the disciples, they quoted Psalm 2 as being spoken “by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of our father David” (Acts 4:23-26). The Psalms are quoted multiple times in the New Testament and given the weight of inspired Scripture. Even though the thoughts of men are being expressed to God, God still shows that He stands behind it.

Because of the nature of the Psalms, we recognize that we don’t read them exactly the same way that we read historical narrative or the epistles. We see the beauty of ancient poetry, the praise of God through masterful figures of speech, and the loftiness of song addressed from heart to heart. Yet with all of the emotion filling up the Psalms, they are much more than that.



The Psalms are rich in theology and doctrine. These are songs and prayers that are filled with covenant concepts. That is, these are written from within the perspective those in God’s covenant. The psalmist, for example,

sees the beauty of the covenant when contrasted with what the world offered outside the covenant. Psalm 1, for example, shows this contrast:

How blessed is the man who does not  
walk in the counsel of the wicked,  
Nor stand in the path of sinners,  
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!  
But his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
And in His law he meditates day and night.  
He will be like a tree firmly planted by  
streams of water,  
Which yields its fruit in its season  
And its leaf does not wither;  
And in whatever he does, he prospers.

This way of thinking is found throughout the Psalms. God is seen as sovereign, the Almighty Creator who showed His lovingkindness toward Israel in making them a people through whom He would fulfill His promises to Abraham. Then, in contrast to God and His greatness, the lowliness of the human condition is seen as well. Note, for example, Psalm 8:3-5:

When I consider Your heavens, the work  
of Your fingers,  
The moon and the stars, which You have  
ordained;  
What is man that You take thought of him,  
And the son of man that You care for him?  
Yet You have made him a little lower than  
God,  
And You crown him with glory and  
majesty!

God takes what appears to be weak and makes it strong. This is a major theme of Scripture overall, and the Psalms show this theme time and again. Yet the human condition is also seen in the Psalms of confession and those that lament the difficulties in which the psalmist found himself. David saw all of these situations and more (see, for example, Psalm 51 as a psalm of confession, and Psalm 22 as a lament of great difficulty). The Psalms put into words the feelings that all feel, the difficulties in the range of emotions, and the desires to rise above the hardships of life often brought on by sin.

The Psalms are often seen in two great categories: psalms of praise and psalms of lament. On the one hand, God is lifted up in praise and adoration. Yet the expressions of lament are throughout and give us the heart of the sufferer. These demonstrate that prayer is not about saying a certain formula. We are to praise God, but we can also pour out our hearts to Him. When we don't understand why, when we feel abandoned, when we are on the verge of doubt, when we feel that the world is against us, the Psalms speak to all of these and help us express ourselves to God.

Throughout the various types of Psalms and themes, we find consistent foreshadowing of the Messiah in the Psalms. Jesus taught that the entire Old Testament pointed to Him, and the Psalms are a significant part of this (see Luke 24:44-45). For example, in Psalm 22 we see the righteous sufferer being mocked, abused, and yet ultimately victorious. Jesus quoted from this Psalm while on the cross. In Psalm 110 we see the beauty of the kingly priest who serves after the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5-7). In Psalm 2 we have glimpses of God's great King who proclaims victory over those who have tried to fight against Him. Over and over again we find that the Psalms are fulfilled in Jesus, and this helps Christians today see the value and applications of this great prayerbook and hymnal.

We need to read, study, and reflect upon the Psalms because not only will we find the attitudes and issues that we see in ourselves, we will find God. We will find Christ Jesus our Lord. This, in turn, will help us better understand and enjoy the beauty of the relationship we have with our Creator.

*Doy Moyer*