**"THE BOOK OF PSALMS"**

**Introduction To The Psalms**

**September 9, 2020**

The value of the Old Testament to the Christian is expressed several times in the New Testament:

**For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. (**[**Ro 15:4**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ro%2015.4)**)**

**Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. (**[**1Co 10:11**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1Co%2010.11)**)**

Paul reminded Timothy of the importance of the Old Testament scriptures that he learned as a child:

**But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.**

**All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (**[**2 Ti 3:14-17**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/2Ti%203.14-17)**)**

**Why Study The Psalms?**

As Christians, we are commanded to utilize the Psalms:

**Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, (**[**Ep 5:19**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ep%205.19)**)**

**Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (**[**Col 3:16**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Col%203.16)**)**

**Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. ([Jm 5:13](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Jm%205.13" \t "_blank))**

Thus the Psalms are useful for singing praises to God. They are also useful for teaching and confirming that Jesus is the Christ or Messiah. Note the use Jesus made of them ([**Lk 24:44-47**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Lk%2024.44-47)), and also Peter's use of them in his first gospel sermon ([**Ac 2:25-28**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ac%202.25-28)**,[34-35](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ac%202.34-35" \t "_blank)**).

It has been said that in the Psalms one finds "expressed the eager yearning and longing for God's presence". It certainly contains "prayers and songs of joyous trust and praise." Indeed, every emotion known to man is expressed in beautiful and inspired terms (e.g., joy, anger, praise, repentance, trust, even doubt).The psalms are filled with some emotion for which you cannot find the words to express?

The Psalms are capable of serving as:

\* **The Christian's "hymnal"** to assist us in our praise to God

\* **The Christian's "prayer book"** in which we learn how to approach God in prayer

\* **The Christian's "book of evidences"** to strengthen our faith in Jesus Christ

\* **The Christian's "training guide"** for living holy and righteous lives before God

**Study Objectives:**

It is my prayer that as we study this book we will accomplish the following goals:

**Become more familiar with Old Testament poetry** - This is essential to

getting more out the Psalms, and important if we are to avoid misinterpreting them.

**Develop an appreciation and working knowledge of the Psalms** - So one may utilize them for his or her own comfort and encouragement, and in comforting others.

**Glean a clearer picture of God's character** - To better understand God’s love, mercy and deliverance towards the righteous, but also God’s wrath and judgment against the wicked and disobedient.

**Learn more of the Christ in prophecy** - To note descriptions of Christ suffering and glorious reign found in the Psalms, some of which are not found elsewhere in Scripture.

**Consider examples of fulfilled prophecies** - To see in fulfilled prophecy irrefutable arguments for the inspiration of the Scriptures, and for the claim that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah.

These are just a few of the reasons why the Book of Psalms should be read and studied by every Christian.

**Characteristics Of Hebrew Poetry**

Before we get into the background of the Psalms themselves, it may prove beneficial to consider some things about Hebrew poetry. Not only will this help to better understand the nature of the Psalms, but it can also assist in proper interpretation of this portion of Scripture.

One of the things that makes Hebrew poetry different is...

**1) The Use Of "Thought Rhyme"**

Also known as **"parallelism"**, thought rhyme involves arranging thoughts in relation to each other. This is done without a concern as to whether certain words rhyme with each other (as found in most modern poetry). In the Psalms, we find several different kinds of thought rhyme:

**Synonymous parallelism** - The thought of the first line is repeated in the second line, expressed in different words for the sake of emphasis. A good example is found in [**Ps 24:2**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ps%2024.2)...

**For He has founded it upon the seas,**

**And established it upon the waters,** (same idea, reworded)

**Antithetical parallelism** - The truth presented in one line is strengthened by a contrasting statement in the next line. Consider this example from [**Ps 1:6**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ps%201.6)...

**For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,**

**But the way of the ungodly shall perish,** (note the contrast)

**Synthetic parallelism** - The first and second lines bear some definite relation to each other (such as cause and effect, or proposition and conclusion). A good example is [**Ps 119:11**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ps%20119.11)...

**Your word I have hidden in my heart,** (cause)

**That I might not sin against You!** (effect)

**Progressive parallelism** - There are several varieties of this form, the most common being:

**Stair-like** - Composed of several lines, each providing a complete element of the aggregate or composite thought. Notice [**Ps 1:1**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ps%201.1)...

**Blessed is the man...**

**Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,**

**Nor stands in the path of sinners,**

**Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;** (note the progression)

**Climatic** - Here the principal idea in the first line is repeated and expanded to complete the thought. An example is found in [**Ps 29:1**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ps%2029.1)...

**Give unto the LORD, O you mighty ones,** (give what?)

**Give unto the LORD glory and strength,** (the answer)

**Introverted parallelism** - The first line is closely related in thought

to the fourth, and the second to the third. For example, consider [**Psa 91:14**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Psa%2091.14)...

**Because he has set his love upon Me,** (note line 4)

**therefore I will deliver him;** (note line 3)

**I will set him on high,** (note line 2)

**because he has known My name.** (note line 1)

It is often fascinating to note how creative the Hebrew poets were as they composed their poetry using "thought rhyme" rather than "word rhyme". In some cases it even helps in interpreting difficult expressions or phrases. Another characteristic of Hebrew poetry is...

**2) The Lack Of Poetic Rhythm**

Much modern poetry has standard measures of identifiable rhythm, as in the poem "Mary Had A Little Lamb." With the Hebrews, however, the art of poetic rhythm was of secondary consideration. Some suggest that it is not likely that the Hebrew poets had standard measures, worked out and carefully defined. Again, their focus was on "thought rhyme," not "word rhyme."

Finally, an important characteristic of Hebrew poetry is...

**3) The Use of Figurative Expression**

The Psalms are filled with figurative expressions, and as such it is important to keep certain principles of interpretation in mind...

**a) The figure must be accepted and dealt with as a figure of speech, not as a literal statement**

For example, in [**Ps 18:31**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ps%2018.31), the Lord is called "a rock." He is like a rock, but not one literally. In [**Ps 51:4**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ps%2051.4), David says "Against You, You only, have I sinned." Yet he is confessing his sin of adultery with Bathsheba, in which he sinned not only against the Lord, but against his wife, against Uriah, and many others. David was speaking

figuratively for the sake of expressing his deep grief in sinning against God, and we must allow for figurative expressions including hyperbole *(exaggerated statements or claims not meant to be taken literally*) in poetic writings. One needs to be careful and not develop doctrinal beliefs upon what may be figurative expressions not intended to be taken literally.

**b) The figure must be interpreted in light of its meaning in the setting in which it was used**

For example, in [**Ps 23:4**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ps%2023.4), we find the well-known phrase: "the valley of the shadow of death." It is not uncommon to hear the phrase applied at funerals to the act of dying. In the setting of the psalm, however, it refers to a treacherous place (such as a steep valley, where deep shadows can easily cause a misstep resulting in death), where the guiding hand of a shepherd would be very helpful to sheep to avoid death. It is therefore applicable to any time one is in perilous straits and in need of God's guiding hand.

Appreciating these characteristics of Hebrew poetry can help the Psalms become more meaningful, and understanding these characteristics can also help avoid misinterpreting the Psalms.

**Background information On The Psalms**

Having examined some of the unique characteristics of Hebrew poetry in general, let's now focus on the book of Psalms itself...

**1) The Origin Of The Word "Psalm"**

The Greek word is "psalmos", from the Hebrew word "zmr" meaning "to pluck"; i.e., taking hold of the strings of an instrument with the fingers. It implies that the psalms were originally composed to be accompanied by a stringed instrument. "Psalms are songs for the lyre, and therefore lyric poems in the strictest sense."(Delitzsch, Psalms,

Vol. I, p. 7) David and others therefore originally wrote the Psalms to be sung to the accompaniment of the harp.

In New Testament worship, we are told to sing the psalms to the accompaniment of the heart:

**"...in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (**[**Ep 5:19**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ep%205.19)**)**

The phrase, "making melody," comes from the Greek word "psallontes" (literally, plucking the strings of). Therefore, we are to "pluck the strings of our heart" as we sing the psalms (i.e., to sing with emotion).

**2) The History Of The Psalms**

The oldest of the Psalms originate from the time of Moses (1400 B.C.). We have three psalms penned by **Moses**:

[**Exo 15:1-15**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Exo%2015.1-15) - a song of triumph following the crossing of the Red Sea

**Deut 32, 33** - a song of exhortation to keep the Law after entering Canaan

**Ps 90** - a song of meditation, reflection, and prayer

After Moses, the writing of Psalms had its "peaks" and "valleys"...

In **David** (1000 B.C.), the sacred lyric attained to its full maturity.

With **Solomon**, the creation of psalms began to decline; this was "the age of the proverb."

Only twice after this did the creation of psalms rise to any height, and then only for a short period: under **King** **Jehoshaphat** (875 B.C.) and again under **King** **Hezekiah** (725 B.C.).

**3) The Authors Of The Psalms**

**David** - Commonly thought to be the author of the book of Psalms, but he actually wrote only about seventy-three (73), less than half.

**Asaph** - The music director during the reigns of David and Solomon ([**1 Chr 16:1-7**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1%20Chr%2016.1-7)). He wrote twelve (12) psalms.

**The Sons of Korah** - These were Levites who served in the Temple ([**1 Chr 26:1-19**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1%20Chr%2026.1-19)). They wrote twelve (12) psalms.

**Solomon** - At least two (2) psalms are attributed to him (**Ps 72, 127**). That he wrote many more is stated in [**1Ki 4:29-32**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1Ki%204.29-32).

**Moses** - As indicated above, he wrote the earliest psalms; one is included in Psalms (**Ps 90**).

**Heman** - Contemporary with David and Asaph, and is known as "the singer" ([**1Ch 6:33**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1Ch%206.33)). He wrote one psalm (**Ps 88**) that has been preserved.

**Ethan** - A companion with Asaph and Heman in the Temple worship ([**1 Chr 15:19**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1%20Chr%2015.19)). He wrote one psalm (**Ps 89**).

**Anonymous** - The authorship of forty-eight (48) of the psalms is unknown and some possibly attributed to female psalmist.

**4) The Arrangement Of The Psalms**

The Psalms were originally collected into five **"books"**:

**Book I (Ps 1-41)**

**Book II (Ps 42-72)**

**Book III (Ps 73-89)**

**Book IV (Ps 90-106)**

**Book V (Ps 107-150)**

The Psalms can also be arranged into chief **"groups"**...

**Alphabetic or Acrostic** - These psalms have lines which in Hebrew start with words whose first letters follow a certain pattern. For example, in **Ps 119** *(the longest of all the psalms)*the first eight lines start with words beginning with the Hebrew letter ALEPH, the second eight lines with words beginning with BETH, etc. This may have been done to aid in the memorization of the psalm.

**Ethical** - These psalms teach moral principles. A good example is **Psa 15.**

**Hallelujah** - These are psalms of praise, beginning and/or ending with "hallelujah" or "praise Jehovah" or “praise/bless the Lord”. **Ps 103** is one such example.

**Historical** - Psalms which review the history of God's dealings with His people. A good sample would be **Ps 106**.

**Imprecatory** - These psalms invoke God to bring punishment or judgment upon one's enemies. Consider **Ps 69** as an example.

**Messianic** - Psalms pertaining to the coming Messiah. For example, look at **Ps 2** or **Ps 110**.

**Penitential** - These are psalms expressing sorrow for sins that have been committed. A classic example is David's psalm in **Ps 51**.

**Songs Of Ascent (or Songs Of Degrees)** - These psalms were possibly sung during the pilgrimages to Jerusalem to observe the feasts. They are grouped together as **Ps 120-134**.

**Suffering** - These psalms are cries of those suffering affliction. **Psa 102** is a typical example.

**Thanksgiving** - Psalms of grateful praise to Jehovah for blessings received. For example, take a look at **Ps 100**.

The various **"styles"** of the psalms can be described as...

**Didactic** - Psalms of teaching and instruction (e.g., **Ps 1**).

**Liturgical** - Responsive readings, for use in special worship services (e.g., **Ps 136**).

**Meditation** - The ancient Hebrews were given to meditation, which spirit finds expression in many of the psalms (e.g., **Ps 119**).

**Praise and Devotion** - Psalms of joyful praise (e.g., **Ps 100,148, 150**).

**Prayer and Petition** - Psalms which were sung in an attitude of prayer (e.g., **Ps 51**).

**Rhythm of Life: Orientation, Disorientation and Reorientation or New Orientation** *excerpts for the Psalms and the Life of Faith by Walter Brueggemann*

Have you ever considered what it means to be transparent before God and your fellow brothers and sisters? Consider the rhythms and seasons of life in a fallen world. Walter Brueggemann’s work on the Psalms and his paradigm for life’s rhythms is refreshing and thought provoking. I have pulled together a helpful summary from a few different sources that capture Brueggeman’s thoughts on the matter. I have found this framework quite helpful and very true to life.

Brueggemann has developed a very intriguing way of categorizing the Psalms and bringing them into our own personal lives. In his book entitled *Praying the Psalms*he suggests that the *psalms reflect two very basic movements in everyone’s life.*

The *first is the move into the “pit”.* It happens when our world collapses around us and we feel that there is no way out of the deep hole into which we have sunk. *The second is the move out of the pit into a welcome place.*We suddenly understand what has happened and who has brought us up out of the pit.

Brueggemann further suggests that human beings regularly find themselves in *one of three places:*

1. a place of *orientation,*in which everything makes sense in our lives;
2. a place of *disorientation,*in which we feel we have sunk into the pit; and
3. a place of reorientation or *new orientation*, in which we realize that God has lifted us out of the pit and we are in a new place full of gratitude and awareness about our lives and our God.

Using these three “places,” Brueggemann suggests that life has a rhythm as we move from one place to the next. He believes that that psalms match those places and the surprisingly painful and joyful moves we make. In short, there are psalms of orientation, disorientation, and new orientation or reorientation. Recognizing that different psalms match these three places in our lives can help us identify psalms that fit our personal lives.

Brueggemann helpfully categorizes the psalms around this larger scheme. By doing so he gives believers moving through the three-fold cycle a voice and framework for engaging God. The Psalms are a sufficient resource to enable robust faith in the face of any situation.

**Psalms of Orientation:**

* Creation – in which we consider the world and our place in it
* Torah – in which we consider the importance of God’s revealed will
* Wisdom – in which we consider the importance of living well
* Narrative – in which we consider our past and its influence on our present
* Psalms of Trust – in which we express our trust in God’s care and goodness

**Psalms of Disorientation:**

* Lament – in which we/I express anger, frustration, confusion about the experience of God’s absence (both communal and individual laments)
* Penitential – in which we/I express regret and sorrow over wrongs we have done (both communal and individual penitential psalms)

**Psalms Reorientation or New orientation:**

* Thanksgiving – in which we thank God for what God has done for us/me (both communal and individual thanksgiving psalms)
* Hymns of Praise – in which we praise God for who God is
* Zion Psalms – in which we praise God for our home
* Royal Psalms – in which we consider the role of political leadership
* Covenant Renewal – in which we renew our relationship with God

If you are interested in his full discussion of this topic his book is: The [Psalms and the Life of Faith.](https://korycapps.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/w-brueggemann_psalms-and-life-of-faith.pdf)

Hopefully, this brief background of the Book Of Psalms will help one gain a better feel and appreciation for this type of Scripture.

**Review Questions For The Introduction**

**1) According to** [**Ro 15:4**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ro%2015.4)**, why was the Old Testament written?**

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**2) According to** [**1Co 10:11**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1Co%2010.11)**, why were the events in Old Testament times recorded?** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**3) As Paul reminded Timothy, of what value were the Scriptures (Old Testament) he had learned as a child? (cf.** [**2Ti 3:14-15**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/2Ti%203.14-15)**)**

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**4) What is Scripture profitable for, including the Old Testament? (cf.** [**2Ti 3:16-17**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/2Ti%203.16-17)**)**

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**5) What three Scriptures teach Christians to utilize the Psalms?**

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**6) What are the Psalms capable of serving for the Christian?**

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**7) What will be the aim of this study in the Psalms?**

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**8) What three characteristics of Hebrew poetry were pointed out in this introduction?**

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**9) List the five different types of "parallelism" described in this study.** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**10) What was the original meaning of the word "psalm"?** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**11) In New Testament worship, what is the instrument upon which melody is to be played? (cf.** [**Ep 5:19**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ep%205.19)**)** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**12) Who wrote some of the earliest Psalms?** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**13) When did the writing of Psalms reach its peak**? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**14) List some of the authors who penned the Psalms in our Bible.**

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**15) List different "groups" into which the Psalms can be placed.**

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**16) List the different "styles" of the Psalms.**

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**17)** **What are the 3 “rhythms of life depicted in the Psalms as describe by Walter Brueggemann?** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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**18) List examples of orientation?** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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**19) List example of Disorientation.** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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**20) List examples of Reorientation and New Orientation?** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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