

*The Psalms: Structure, Content & Message*  
Sunday Morning Bible Study  
Chapter 10 – Wisdom Psalms

INTRODUCTION

- Introduction: Page 111
- Wisdom psalms are a unique type of literature, “somewhat transitional between worship psalms and instruction in wisdom” (111)
- In wisdom literature we distinguish between wisdom sayings and wisdom poems or songs
  - Psalms 120-134 (pilgrimage songs) contain a few wisdom sayings, simple proverbs that deal with every day life
    - Psalm 127:1—contrasts human striving and God’s quiet rule
    - Psalm 127:3-5—celebrates a large and healthy family
    - Psalm 127:133—celebrates the family as reward for fearing God
  - These psalms could be placed in wisdom literature without changing any words, and people would think they belonged there
  - These proverbs show that in the late period psalms and wisdom (to be specific, wisdom that had become theological) had come to be closely related

PSALM STUDY

- **Psalm 37**
  - Proverbs combined with psalm
  - “Here we have a different group of proverbs which deal with the righteous and the wicked, contrasting the two groups, calling for the fear of God and warning against evil and foolishness” (112).
  - “Psalm 37 is, as a whole, the instruction of a wise person, who warns hearers against being upset because of the wicked, but exhorts them to trust God, for God will finally punish the wicked and grant salvation to the righteous” (112).
  - Uniquely tied to the Psalms of Individual Lament
    - “Behind the coolness of the admonitions addressed to righteous persons can be felt the hidden heat of passionate pleading such as we met in this genre’s complaints about enemies” (112).
    - Verses 7-8 are basically the question, “How can you, O God, permit such a thing?”
  - Contrast of the righteous and wicked also seen in Psalms 1, 112, and 128
- **Psalm 112**
  - Similar to Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17:5-8
  - Contrast of the two different ways of living
  - The pious person is congratulated as fortunate (grows from Pss. 34:8; 40:4)
  - Highlights the joy of him who fears God
  - Highlights the peace and security of him who fears God

- **Psalm 49**
  - Highlights the “vexations and temptations to despair” that we hear in the righteous person when he gives wisdom concerning the wicked (113)
  - A lament psalm in genre but represents the transition from lament to meditative reflection and then to wisdom speech
  - Question about the wicked (vv. 6-7) is answered in verse 15 (“but” marks the turning point in the lament)
  
- **Psalm 73**
  - Highlights the despair that righteous people have over the prosperity of wicked people
    - Begins with the problem: “For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked” (v. 3)
    - “What almost brought the psalmist to a denial of God was not, as is usually the case of the psalms of lament, the fact of being endangered or hard-pressed by evildoers (as e.g. in Psalm 22), nor yet the suffering which he had to endure (the I-complaint). Rather, it was being vexed and tempted to despair by evildoers’ continuing success and prosperity, while the righteous suffered in an impotent, senseless manner” (114-115).
  - Turning point comes in v. 17: God’s hitherto hidden activity is now perceived, understood, and acknowledged
    - God will bring the wicked to ruin but preserve the righteous
  - See also Psalms 34, 111, and 139 for examples of other pseudo-Wisdom Psalms

#### Discussion Questions

- Can you think of an example of a song we sing that teaches wisdom? Should we use more of them?
- Should Christians look forward to the day when the wicked will be punished?
- How should Christians respond to the prosperity of the wicked?