

The Psalms: Structure, Content & Message
Sunday Morning Bible Study
Chapter 7 – Liturgical Psalms

INTRODUCTION

- Introduction: Pages 97-98
 - The topic: Liturgical Psalms
 - Review what “liturgy” means
- “Those psalms are called *liturgies* which are clearly shaped by some liturgical activity, those in which a combination of liturgical speech with liturgical action can be recognized.
- There is an interchange between two groups—a call and a response
- There may be a call for certain actions
 - Prostration, bowing, rising, movement of the hands, walking in procession, entering the sanctuary area, walking around the altar, performance of an act of dedication, of a sacrifice, of a sacred meal, etc.
- No psalm reproduces a complete worship service. The liturgical action is always merely alluded to in the psalm.

SACRIFICE OF PRAISE AND PSALM OF PRAISE

- Psalm 66
 - Remember the IP psalms and their connection to sacrifice of praise
 - Verses 13-15 of Psalm 66 reproduce the declaration of sacrifice, i.e. the words which were spoken at an actual offering of a sacrifice
 - READ Psalm 66
- Psalm 118
 - All reference to the sacrifice of praise is missing; in its place is the narrative praise of an individual (vv. 2-7, 17-20)
 - READ Psalm 118
- Psalm 107
 - Psalm of descriptive praise, consisting of a combination of four songs of confessing praise by four persons who had been rescued
 - A traveler who lost his way, a prisoner, a sick person, and a sailor who had met danger at sea—all four bring their confession of praise into the presence of God at the sanctuary.
 - Each experienced summarized by a refrain: “Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to the sons of men!”
 - READ Psalm 107

PILGRIMAGE SONGS

- The very journey to a sanctuary was itself considered part of the sacred activity
- The words of the pilgrimage song belonged to the observance
- Two key points of the journey are departure from home and arrival at the sanctuary
- Psalms 120-134 all have the superscription “pilgrimage song” but only Psalm 122 is a true pilgrimage songs. The others were probably part of a collection.
- Pilgrimage songs imitated in Isaiah 2:3; Micah 4:2; Jeremiah 31:6; Isaiah 3:29
- READ Psalm 122
 - Verses 1-2 speak of departure and arrival
 - Verses 3-5 address Jerusalem
 - Verses 6-9 greet the city

SONGS OF ZION

- Psalms 46, 48, 76, 84, 87
- “They focus on the city of God’s preservation from enemy attack. In the background of these psalms stands the tradition which claimed that Zion, which its temple and city, had been chosen as God’s mountain” (101).
- God wins a great victory over the Gentiles at the gate of the city. The victory is observed with a procession (48:12-13).
- READ Psalm 46

PSALMS OF BLESSING

- The journey from the sanctuary back home was equally important
- All important celebrations at the sanctuary ended with the bestowal and reception of the blessing.
- Great emphasis on the blessing in these psalms shows that the Israelites greatly valued receiving the blessing as part of their pilgrimage to Zion.
- READ Psalm 121
 - Genuine and specific psalm of blessing
 - From vv. 3-8 a different voice speaks: a priest speaks a blessing to the one leaving the sanctuary.

ENTRANCE INSTRUCTIONS

- “Several psalms permit us to see that on specific occasions entrance into the sanctuary and reception of the Lord’s blessing there were limited by prerequisites.
- Seen in Isaiah 33:14-16
- READ Psalm 24
- READ Psalm 15

DISCUSSION

- Can you think of a song we sing that is liturgical?