

“OT Survey: Psalms”
(Lesson Two: Types and Uses of Psalms)

I. Introduction.

A. Review.

1. We considered the Bible as a covenant document:
 - a. Preamble: Who the Lord is.
 - b. Historic Prologue: Why we should serve Him.
 - c. Stipulations: What He wants us to do/not do.
 - d. Sanctions: Blessings for obedience; curses for disobedience.
 - e. Disposition: Where to place the document and how often to read it.

2. The psalms help us fulfill the stipulations.
 - a. We are in covenant with God through Jesus Christ, and as such, we are bound to worship the Lord our God.
 - b. The psalms help give fuller expression to worship.

B. Preview.

1. The psalms serve several purposes today:
 - a. Paul tells us that the psalms form part of our New Covenant worship: “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:18-19).
 - b. They help us express our trust in the Lord, even as Israel of old.
 - c. They help us express our desire for communion with the Lord.
 - d. They help us to look forward to the consummation of God’s kingdom.
 - e. They teach us how to pray and respond to difficulties in the Christian life.
 - f. They are God’s Word to us: part of the authoritative canon of Scripture.

2. Should we sing psalms exclusively?
 - a. Some believe the regulative principle requires that we do.
 - (i) We must only do what is commanded in worship (agreed).
 - (ii) In their understanding, Ephesians 5:19 refers only to the psalms.

 - b. Arguments against:
 - (i) The terms of Ephesians 5:19 don’t necessarily refer to the psalms exclusively.
 - (ii) There appear to be examples of hymns in the NT:
 - (a) “By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory” (1 Tim. 3:16).
 - (b) “Which He will bring about at the proper time – He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him *be* honor and eternal dominion! Amen” (6:15-16).

 - (iii) It would seem unreasonable to suppose that the Lord would hold us to a form of words in singing, when He doesn’t appear to in other areas.
 - (a) We are not bound to a set form of words in preaching or in prayer.
 - (b) Why would He require this in praise, which, as we’ll see, is often simply another form of prayer?

 - (iv) It would further seem unreasonable to suppose the Lord would require us to sing using the types and shadows of the OT, when we have the clearer light of the NT.

- (a) The author to the Hebrews urged his readers to press forward to the reality.
- (b) If exclusive psalmody is correct, we are forbidden to mention the name of Jesus in worship.
- (v) However, the psalms do teach us how to worship.
 - (a) We are required to worship the Lord in Spirit and in *truth* (John 4:24).
 - (b) Our expressions of praise must be true and full.

II. The Psalms.

A. Overall Structure.

1. The book is divided into five books.
 - a. I:1-41; II:42-72; III:73-89; IV:90-106; V:107-150.
 - b. Each book ends with doxology: Psalm 41:13; 72:18-20; 89:52; 106:47-48; 150.
2. There are a variety of authors:
 - a. Not all are identified.
 - b. But several are: David, Jeduthan (the Levite David appointed to be director of music in the Temple with Heman and Asaph), sons of Korah, Asaph, Solomon, Heman the Ezrahite, Ethan the Ezrahite (a counselor of Solomon), and Moses.
3. Some have suggested that there is movement from primarily lamentation to that of praise.
 - a. The book begins with a psalm (Psalm one) that defines God's moral standard:
 - (i) The Law of God is true wisdom.
 - (ii) That man is blessed who delights in and walks in it.
 - (iii) That man is cursed who turns from it to evil.
 - b. The second psalm is a call to all to submit to the Lord's Messiah.
 - c. Then begins a section of five psalms that are primarily lamentations.
 - d. But the book ends with five psalms of praise: 146-150.
4. The psalms are primarily poetic.
 - a. They don't contain rhyme and are weak in meter.
 - b. Their main features are repetition of sounds and parallelism.
 - (i) Psalm 119 is divided into 22 groups, with each group beginning each sentence with a particular letter of the Hebrew alphabet.
 - (ii) Psalm 1 shows us an example of parallelism:
 - (a) Typically it is in this form: a, what's more, b.
 - (b) "How blessed is the man who does not *walk in the counsel of the wicked.*"
 - (c) "Nor *stand in the path of sinners.*"
 - (d) "Nor *sit in the seat of scoffers.*"
 - (e) Each section repeats and intensifies what was said before.

B. Main types of psalms.

1. Praise: thanksgiving to God, containing exhortation to praise, summary of God's deliverance, a look back at the situation, and praise, either from an individual or as a community (*e.g.*, Psalm 9).
2. Lamentation: containing a plea for help, looking to past deliverances, description of situation, confession of trust, often containing imprecations (see Psalm 137), a vow to praise if delivered (*e.g.*, Psalm 5; NB: some psalms are combinations of praise and lamentation).
3. Messianic: Clearly point beyond the immediate reference to the Messiah (*e.g.* Psalm 2, 72).
4. Wisdom: uphold true godliness (wisdom), contrasts the way of the righteous and wicked and their end (*e.g.*, Psalm 1, 119).
5. Many of them are prayers, since they are communications to God.
6. The psalms encourage us to express a wide range of affection and to bring our whole lives into worship, as well as pointing us forward to the consummation of all things.