

MANual Lessons from Psalms: Introduction

Our journey this year through the books of the Bible now brings us to the very center of Scripture: the Psalms. There are so many lessons to learn from the Psalms that I'll need to break it into several posts. I'll start with an overview and some interesting facts that emphasize the central theme we find right in the center of the Christian Bible: **"It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man"** (Psalm 118:8). Next week, I'll return to the specific lessons in Psalms in another post.

About the Psalms

The MANual, my NIV (New International Version) Bible for Men, refers to the 150 chapters of Psalms as a book of "life songs" since the original title, *Tehillim* means "praise songs" in Hebrew. The English title we know as Psalms originated from Septuigant's title, *Psalmoi*, which also means "songs of praise."

The Psalms give modern readers an insight into the religious life of the Hebrews that's much different from other Old Testament writings. They counteract the formalism that became prevalent in the Temple services and other practices of the Israelites that I wrote about in my previous posts from the five books of Moses, the twelve historical books of Israel, and the books of Poetry (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs as explained in my last post.)

The Psalmists

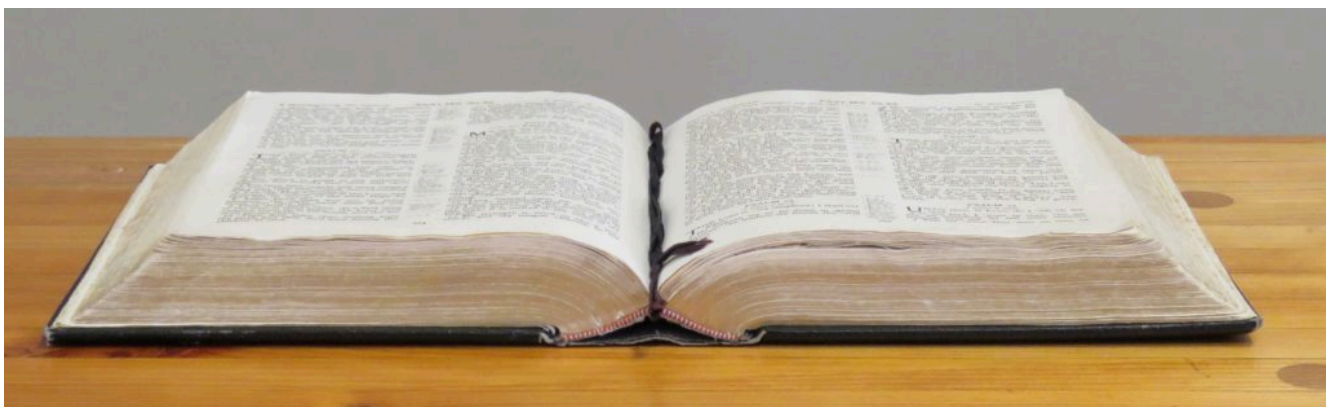
The various authors called the psalmists, pour out their hearts honestly to God. You feel their sorrow and guilt, their regrets and joys, their fears, and anger. Many psalms were read or sung as part of worship to remind us that God is

worthy of our praise, no matter how we feel.

The 150 chapters of Psalms were written between the time of Moses (about 1440 B.C.) and the time following the Babylonian captivity (sometime after 538 B.C.). Its authors include King David, Asaph, the sons of Korah, Solomon, Heman, Ethan, and Moses. Some psalms literally name their author in the first line or title (for example, Moses wrote Psalm 90). David composed 73 psalms. Two psalms (72, 127) are attributed to his son and successor, Solomon.

With the exception of Solomon and Moses, the additional authors were all priests or Levites who provided music for worship during David's reign. A group of 12 psalms (50) and (73-83) comes from the family of Asaph, a Levite worship leader. The sons of Korah, (Moses' cousin) wrote 11 psalms (42, 44-49, 84-85, 87-88). Psalm 88 is specifically attributed to Heman, one of the sons assigned by King David since he was probably similar to today's music director or praise band leader. Ethan the Ezrahite, a cymbal player, wrote Psalm 89.

Although some of the psalms are probably as old as the time of King David, the entire collection was not gathered and organized until shortly after the captivity ended about 537 B.C. The chapter divisions and verse numbers were added many centuries after their origin into their present form by an unknown editor.



The Center Lesson of the Bible

My belief is that God inspired the writers of all the sacred texts that became our modern-day Christian Bible. There are many theories and legends about how the books of the Bible were canonized (ordered). While some people refute the Bible's accuracy, its prophecy and alignment with ancient historical records, prove more than a coincidence. I also found this interesting information in another resource that shows God's inspiration in the creation of our Bible.

According to James Montgomery Boice's books on the Psalms, there are 31,174 verses in the Bible so the 15,587th and the 15,588th are the middle verses: "It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes." (Psalm 118:8-9). Boice feels these two verses are the central theme of the entire Bible; not as a simple coincidence, but to point out that God is in complete control.

Other fun facts include Psalm 117 is the shortest chapter in the Bible, whereas 119 is the longest. There are 1,188 chapters in the KJV (King James Version) which directs you to Psalms 118:8. Also, 594 chapters precede Psalm 118 and 594 chapters follow it.

Coincidence? Again, read about some of the prophecies.

No matter whether you believe the tradition that claims Psalms 118:8 as the middle verse or not, our first lesson from Psalms is that we must find refuge in The Lord rather than trust ourselves.

The Five Books of Psalms

While the psalms are not organized by topic, you can compare the dominant themes of each section to the five books of Moses.

Book 1 of the Psalms covers the first 41 chapters that

comprise a collection written by David which is similar to Genesis. These tell how mankind was created, fell into sin, and was then promised redemption.

Book 2 covering chapters 42-72, is a collection of psalms, mainly written by David and the sons of Korah, that is similar to the book of Exodus. Just as Exodus describes the nation of Israel, many of these psalms describe the nation as ruined and then recovered. Just as God rescued the nation of Israel, He also rescues us when we go to Him with our problems and ask for help.

Book 3 with chapters 73-89, contains is a collection mainly written by Asaph or his descendants, which is similar to the book of Leviticus. Just as Leviticus discusses the Tabernacle and God's holiness, many of these psalms discuss the Temple and God's enthronement. These psalms praise God because He is Holy and that His perfect holiness deserves our worship and reverence.

Book 4 with psalms 90-106, mainly written by unknown authors, is similar to the book of Numbers. Just as Numbers discussed the relationship of the nation of Israel to surrounding nations, these psalms often mention the relationship of God's overruling Kingdom to the other nations. These psalms help us keep the events and our troubles on this earth in proper perspective.

Book 5 consists of Psalms 107 through 150 which is similar to the book of Deuteronomy. Mainly written by David, these are anthems of praise and thanksgiving for God and His Word. We can use these psalms as a hymnbook of praise and worship to make our hearts sing.

Many psalms include several unique Hebrew terms like the word *Selah*. Some translations substitute "Interlude" for *Selah* which is used 71 times and a musical notation or crescendo for the singers. Other literary and musical terms, such as *maskil*,

higgaion, and mitcham, also show the psalms were written in different styles for different purposes, but all show how God values songs and the truths they impart.

Each of the five books of Psalms concludes with a doxology that signifies the completion of the collection. For example, Psalm 41:13 ends Book 1: “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen.” The entire Psalm 150 serves as the final doxology to the entire book.



God Buddy Focus

The book of Psalms gives voice to the personal feelings of the psalmists. Think of these as entries in a diary that reflect their most intimate encounters with God. The Psalms can help us during our emotional highs and lows. They encourage us to praise God for who He is and what He has done. They illuminate God’s greatness, affirm His faithfulness to us in times of trouble, and remind us of the centrality of His Word.

Your lesson this week is to make the Psalms central to your day. Commit to read and meditate on Psalms 118:8, “It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man” as a part of a regular time alone with God.

Watch for more about the five books Psalms in the next post.