

Poetry and Prayer Introduction to the Psalms, Psalms 1 – 2

Poetry and Prayer Introduction

- So what is a *Psalm* anyway?
 - The word *Psalm* comes from a Greek word meaning “to pluck” or “to strum”.
 - A psalm, therefore, is a song sung or a poem read to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument, like a guitar, a harp or a lyre.
 - The Hebrew name of the book is *tehillim*, which means “praises”.
- Written music did not appear until about 1000 A.D.
- We don’t know how the melodies originally sounded.
- A good guess would be, “Like music from the Middle East.”
- The Psalms have been adapted to suit the musical tastes of people all over the world in all time periods.

“Christianity is not so much a religion as a relationship with God.”

- Of all the books in the Bible, the Psalms reveal a biblical faith in the most relational way.
- They also show us that this relationship was fully present in Old Testament times.
- In other words, it is not a Christian invention.
 - *The child learns to speak because his father speaks to him. He learns the speech of his father. So we learn to speak to God because God has spoken to us and speaks to us. By means of the speech of the Father in heaven his children learn to speak with him. Repeating God’s own words after him, we begin to pray to him.*
 - Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 1906-1945, in *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible*
- Who wrote the Psalms?
 - David’s name is on 73 of them.
 - A full 50 are anonymous.
 - Solomon 2, Moses 1, with several others thrown in.
- Types of Psalms:
 - Psalms of Thanksgiving, Psalms of Trust
 - Royal Psalms, Messianic Psalms, Enthronement Psalms
 - Penitential Psalms, Lament Psalms, Imprecatory Psalms
 - Wisdom Psalms, Nature Psalms, Historical Psalms
- Others opt for fewer main types, for example just three, all based on mood:
 - Praise
 - Lament
 - Wisdom
- We can then further describe them based on subject matter, such as “Messianic” or “Penitential.”

Some Notes on Hebrew Poetry

- It is similar to ours in at least two ways:
 - It uses plenty of rich, figurative language.
 - It sometimes repeats words or ideas for emphasis.
 - *Most emphatically the Psalms must be read as poems; as lyrics, with all the licences and all the formalities, the hyperboles, the emotional rather than the logical connections, which are proper to lyric poetry. They must be read as poems if they are to be understood; no less than French must be read as French or English as English.*
 - C. S. Lewis, *in Meditations on the Psalms*
- It is different from ours in that it is not mainly about an equal number of beats per line and rhyme. For example:
 - *Twinkle, twinkle little star, how I wonder what you are.*
 - *Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.*
- Hebrew Poetry is less about rhyming and precise rhythm of words than ours is.
- It is more about the relationships between ideas or thoughts expressed from line to line.
- These relationships between lines is called parallelism.
- We will observe various types of parallelism as we go through the whole book.

Two Roads, Two Destinations Psalm 1

- This psalm teaches us that our intended destination should determine which direction we go.
- One way leads to a fruitful life.
- The other leads to disappointment – and judgment if we follow it as far as it will go.
- Parallelism: There will not be a test!
 - 1:1 Focusing >
 - 1:3 Consequentiality →
 - 1:5 Synonymity =
 - 1:6 Complementarity ()
- Notice this:
 - The wicked and the righteous are described.
 - But it's not a question of simply doing the right thing or not.
- The wicked are those who scoff at and reject God's Word.
- The righteous love it and are attentive to it.
- This Psalm is a good one to memorize.

- *While this promise of God's blessing still stands, it is being distorted by those who preach a prosperity gospel that focuses solely on the link between faith in Christ and material prosperity.*
 - *Nupanga Weanzana*

Three Points of Application:

- A fruitful life starts when we cultivate a love for the Bible.
- Choosing the right friends matters.
- Sometimes we have to be patient as we look for fruit to appear, waiting for the right season.

The Ruling Messiah Psalm 2

- The nations and kings of the earth have never been happy about the Lord or his Messiah ruling over them.
- They have consistently rebelled.

- God is undaunted by this.
- His Son will rule.
- All of us will be wise to acknowledge this as quickly as possible.

- If you think this Psalm sounds like it is about Jesus, you are in good company.
- The early church thought the same thing.
- See Acts 4:23-31, directly after Peter and John were released from prison.

Poetry and Prayer Conclusions

- *If we wish to pray with confidence and gladness, then the words of Holy Scripture will have to be the solid basis of our prayer. For here we know that Jesus Christ, the Word of God, teaches us to pray. The words which come from God become, then, the steps on which we find our way to God.*
 - *Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 1906-1945, in Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible*

- The Psalms are going to help us to cultivate a close relationship with God.
- They will teach us about devotion to God.
- They will teach us how to pray.
- They will teach us how to worship.
- They will show us how to express ourselves freely in his presence.

- *While most of the Bible speaks to us about God and God's ways, the psalms help us to speak to God ... they draw us near to God and help us to cry out to him in our times of need and to praise him as he deserves. Praise the Lord!*
 - *Nupanga Weanzana*

- *I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation ... Fully to enjoy is to glorify. In commanding us to glorify Him, God is inviting us to enjoy Him.*
 - C. S. Lewis, *in Meditations on the Psalms*