



The Psalms

Week One



In the Beginning

- Not the beginning, but the beginning of the Psalmsic Tradition
 - 1 Chronicles 16:1-2 So they brought the ark of God, and set it in the midst of the tabernacle that David had erected for it. Then they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before God. 2 And when David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD.

David Institutes Levitical Music

- This was a day of great celebration
 - Feasting
 - Singing
 - 1 Chronicles 16:3-4 Then he distributed to everyone of Israel, both man and woman, to everyone a loaf of bread, a piece of meat, and a cake of raisins. 4 And he appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, to commemorate, to thank, and to praise the LORD God of Israel:

The Language of Praise

- מְשָׂרְתִים וְלִהְזָכִיר וְלִהְלֵל לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
- “to be ministers” məšārṭîm
 - “to commemorate” ləhazkîr
 - Zakar is an important word, cf. Exodus 3:15
 - This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations.’
 - Exodus 20:24
 - 'An altar of earth you shall make for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you.



זכר

- Psalm 38:1 A Psalm of David. To bring to remembrance
- Psalm 70:1 To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David. To bring to remembrance.
- Psalm 77:11 I will remember the works of the LORD; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old.
- Isaiah 12:4 And in that day you will say: "Praise the LORD, call upon His name; Declare His deeds among the peoples, Make mention that His name is exalted



הודות

- “to thank” ləhōdôṯ
 - Psalm 92:1 A Psalm. A Song for the Sabbath day. It is good to give thanks to the LORD, And to sing praises to Your name, O Most High;
 - Psalm 105:1-2 Oh, give thanks to the LORD! Call upon His name; Make known His deeds among the peoples! 2 Sing to Him, sing psalms to Him; Talk of all His wondrous works!
 - Psalm 106:1-2 Praise the LORD! Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. 2 Who can utter the mighty acts of the LORD? Who can declare all His praise?
 - Psalm 107:1 Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.



הללויה

- “to praise” ləhallēl
 - Psalm 9:1 I will praise You, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will tell of all Your marvelous works.
 - Psalm 33:1 Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous! For praise from the upright is beautiful.
 - Psalm 34:1 I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth.
 - תְּהַלְּלוּ בְּפִי
 - Psalm 40:3 He has put a new song in my mouth -
- Praise to our God;

David's Further Contribution

- 1 Chronicles 23:25-32 For David said, "The LORD God of Israel has given rest to His people, that they may dwell in Jerusalem forever"; 26 and also to the Levites, "They shall no longer carry the tabernacle, or any of the articles for its service."
- 27 For by the last words of David the Levites were numbered from twenty years old and above; 28 because their duty was to help the sons of Aaron in the service of the house of the LORD, in the courts and in the chambers, in the purifying of all holy things and the work of the service of the house of God, 29 both with the showbread and the fine flour for the grain offering, with the unleavened cakes and what is baked in the pan, with what is mixed and with all kinds of measures and sizes;

David's Further Contribution

- 1 Chronicles 25: 25-32
30 to stand every morning to thank and praise the LORD, and likewise at evening; 31 and at every presentation of a burnt offering to the LORD on the Sabbaths and on the New Moons and on the set feasts, by number according to the ordinance governing them, regularly before the LORD;
- 32 and that they should attend to the needs of the tabernacle of meeting, the needs of the holy place, and the needs of the sons of Aaron their brethren in the work of the house of the LORD.

Levitical Worship Resumes

- Nehemiah 12:24 And the heads of the Levites were Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua the son of Kadmiel, with their brothers across from them, to praise and give thanks, group alternating with group, according to the command of David the man of God.



The Hebrew Title

- In the Hebrew Bible the psalms are called the *Book of Praises*
 - sefer tehillim
 - Although the word "praise" occurs frequently in the Psalter, only one psalm, 145 has the title tehilla.
- תְּהִלָּה לַדָּוִד
- An earlier name for a portion of the psalter was apparently “prayers.”
 - Psalm 72:20 The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.



Thanksgiving

- The word “thanksgiving” is also used as a title
 - This is *directly* addressed to God.
 - Almost 2/3 of the psalms directly address God at some point
- The Psalms are “lyrical prayers” and are naturally addressed to God
- In ancient times, reading was primarily oral/aural.
 - This is actually a good way to read the Psalms



מזמור

- In the Greek Bible the translators used *psalmos*, “psalm,” to translate the Hebrew *mizmor*
 - A technical term for a song with musical accompaniment.
 - Psalm 4:1 To the Chief Musician. With stringed instruments. A Psalm of David.
 - Psalm 5:1 To the Chief Musician. With flutes. A Psalm of David
 - Psalm 30:1 A Psalm. A Song at the dedication of the house of David.



Versions of the Psalms

- Hebrew masoretic text or Babylonian text
- Greek texts
 - LXX probably a palestinian vorlage
 - Aquila
 - Theodotian
 - Symmachus
- Aramaic Targum
- Syriac
- Latin
 - Old Latin Psalter, Gallican Psalter, Psalterium Hebraeos Hieronymi

Mitchell Dahood and Ugaritic

- Dahood's 3 volume commentary on the Psalms (the Anchor Bible Series)
 - is a massive work
 - it is extensively based on his understanding of the substantial lyrical work from Ras Shamra
- Dahood believed that Ugaritic discoveries reduced the significance of the ancient versions and traditions.
 - He maintained the consonantal text, but freely reconstructed its vocalization
 - based on comparisons with his reconstruction of Ugaritic vocalization
 - The method was circular;
 - the product was a *rewritten* Psalter according to Dahood.
 - The work is too extreme to find widespread acceptance.
 - Craigie's commentary on the Psalms (Word Series) accepts a good bit of Dahood's material.



The Book of the Heart

- The Psalter is a very powerful collection of a variety of poetic forms:
 - These forms come from many different times and conditions within the history of God's people.
 - More than any other part of the canon the Psalter addresses itself directly to the heart.
- Because they speak directly to the inner life, they have an almost intuitive connection with God's people, across continents and centuries
 - However we need to be careful because the psalms must not be romanticized into a 20th century context.
 - It is important to interpret them in their historical context before we apply them to our contemporary context

A. Berkley Mickelson

- In his book *Interpreting the Bible* makes these suggestions
 - Seek out the Historical Setting:
 - The titles or ascriptions often help,
 - if we understand the occasion we will understand the tone or tenor of the psalm.
 - Modern interpreters go overboard with finding the occasion of the Psalm in a cultic context.
 - Mowinckel and Gunkel: *sitz im leben*
 - Calvin called the psalms *an anatomy of all parts of the soul*,
 - so we must look for the prevailing mood, attitude, psychological & emotional tone.
 - Understand the personality of the poet.



A. Berkley Mickelson

- Observe the particular insight the poet has into the being and nature of God.
- In the Messianic psalms note
 - the typical elements
 - elements that seem to apply **only** to the Messiah.
- In the imprecatory elements we need to see
 - not only the outrage of the psalmist
 - but understand that he rises by inspiration above his own indignation to express God's indignation against man's inhumanity to man.

Classification of Psalms

- Since Gunkel, the “need” to identify the genre of the Psalms has led to many schemes of classification
 - Bruce Waltke suggests 7 basic psalm types
 - Laments of the individual (7 & 51)
 - Laments of the people (44)
 - Thanksgivings
 - Hymns (of praise): [processional Hymns 120 – 134]
 - Royal Psalms: 2, 18, 20, 21 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 145.
 - Songs of YHWHs enthronement 47, 93, 95–99.
 - Minor Miscellaneous Types

Waltke and the Messianic Type

- Dr Waltke observed that since the NT quotes the Psalms at least 93 times,
 - more than any other book in the OT
 - one can argue they are all to some extent messianic
- He labels this a “broadly eschatological / messianic approach”

Waltke's Messianic Types

- Typically Messianic
 - presentation of a TYPE for the Messiah;
- Typico–prophetically Messianic
 - Language describing psalmist's own experience is hyperbolic but at the same time more literally true of Christ's experience.
- Indirectly Messianic
 - A psalm directly descriptive of a contemporary king (David or direct descendent)]
- Purely Prophetic
 - Sole reference is made to Christ, exclusive of any other son of David.
- Eschatologically – Yahwistic Psalms
 - this refers to the consummation of Jehovah's kingdom
 - fulfillment being found specifically in the person of Jesus Christ



Milton C. Fisher

- Dr Fisher presented a simplified arrangement
 - Praise
 - Petition
 - Prophetic
 - Riv
 - Promise
 - Predictions (including messianic)
 - Imprecatory
 - Didactic



Theology of the Psalms

- In the Psalms we find applied theology
 - personally appropriate doctrines.
 - Creation/Providence; 8, 29, 46 139
- Psalm 50 the exodus
 - vs. 17 *correction / admonition* מוֹסֵר ;
 - vs. 21 — 23 cf. Is 1:18;
- Pastoral Theology of the Psalms:
 - The Psalms being the most personal and intimate of God's revelations of His grace are the most suited for speaking to people when they hurt.



G. Handy Wailes

- Rabbinic comment often quoted by Dr. Wailes,
 - “God gave Israel 5 books of law & grateful Israel responded with 5 books of praise”
- The oldest collections of the Pss group the Psalms into five books this way:
 - Pss of David — 1-41
 - Pss of Asaph — 50, 73-83 [12]
 - Pss of Sons of Korah — 42-49, 84, 85, 87 & 88 [12]
 - Processional Hymns (Pss of Ascent) — 120-134
 - Pss of Praise “Hallelujah” — 105-107, 111-114, 116-118

The “Modern collection”

- 5 Books as in the Masoretic Text are:
 - 1 – 41:13
 - 42 – 72:19
 - 73 – 89:52
 - 90 – 106:48
 - 107 – 150
- Each book ends with a *doxology*
- The collection ends with 5 *doxologies*
 - and Ps 150 is “the great hallal”
 - Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD!
 - kōl hannəšāmā^h təhallēl yāh ḥəlōlû-yāh
 - כָּל הַנְּשָׁמָה תְהַלֵּל יְהוָה הַלְלוּ־יְהוָה



Structure

- There are some duplications, most notably Ps 14 = Ps 53
 - Why is this?
 - Arranged for a purpose, maybe some regular worship activity
- There is evidence that the whole 150 were carefully organized, since some Psalms link together with the previous.
 - Some were actually joined originally (e.g. 9-10 are an acrostic. 42-43 have the same refrain, three times)
- Superscripts—brief notes at the start of many psalms, are ancient and should be considered
 - Jesus accepts the Davidic attribution of Psalm 110 when he cites it in Mark 12:35-37
 - In all Hebrew bibles, back to the very oldest ones,
 - the superscripts are marked as the first verse
 - Compare with the superscriptions in LXX and Vulgate
 - Psalm 146 (145 LXX)



Passover Hallel

- Psalms 113-118
 - 113 & 114 Read before the meal
 - 115 – 118 read after the meal
 - Read these last psalms sometime and reflect on the last passover Jesus kept with the disciples



Studying the Psalms

- See it primarily as teachings (Early church, up to reformation)
 - lack of focus on beauty and literature
- Reformation
 - began (with Luther and Calvin) to value both form and content
- Modern criticism of late 1800, early 1900s
 - Analytical/Critical
- Form critical approach (Mowinckel)
 - the literary form or genre of each psalm
- Cultic approach – (Gunkel)
 - attempts to reconstruct worship events
- Eclectic approach (pick the best out of all the others)