

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

INTRODUCTION TO THE PSALMS

- Study 1 - The Hymnic Literature Part 1 by Dr. Bruce Waltke
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1 Chronicles 16:4 says that he, (David) appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the Lord, to make petition, to give thanks, and to praise the Lord, the God of Israel. The Psalms were written and compiled for use in these ways in the Nation of Israel. They were also for centuries the song book of the church.

We immediately identify with them when we want to express from the heart our own feelings of:

Dependence on the Lord

*O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you,
My soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in
A dry and weary land where there is no water.*

Psalm 63:1 NIV

Deep and Often Unspoken Needs

*How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and every day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?*

Psalm 13:1—2 NIV

Thanksgiving For Blessings Received

*Give thanks to the Lord, for He is God,
His love endures forever.
Let the redeemed of the Lord say this.*

Psalm 107:1—2 NIV

Songs of Praise

*Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord, O my soul
I will praise the Lord all my life
I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.*

Psalm 146:1—2 NIV

For the first two studies no preparation is required. The study questions are based on a tape by Dr. Bruce Waltke on the Hymnic Literature. Before proceeding with Study 3 we would ask you to read the material taken from "How To Read the Bible For All Its Worth" by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart. These will, we hope equip you to read, understand and enjoy the Psalms.

INTRODUCTION TO THE PSALMS

STUDY 1

This study is based on a lecture by Dr. Bruce Waltke entitled The Hymnic Literature. Before listening to the tape read the questions in this study and then answer the questions while listening to the tape.

1. When were the Psalms compiled?
2. The book has ___ divisions each ending in a_____?
3. Enumerate the Psalms contained in each division.
4. In order to understand the Psalms we should be aware that Hebrew poetry is characterized by:
 - a)
 - b)
5. List the types of parallelism used in the Psalms.
What are their characteristics?
6. What percentage of the Old Testament is written in poetry?
7. List the main forms or categories of Psalms.
8. Where in the Old Testament is this list given?
9. What are the two kinds of Lament Psalms?
10. List some of their characteristics.
11. Praise is an important part of all but what Psalm?
12. What is the meaning of the word "psalm"?
13. Psalm 44 is a Community Lament.
 - a) List its main parts.
 - b) What is the source of their confidence?

- c) Identify their lament.
- d) For what do they petition God?
- e) Of what are they aware?

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STUDY II

This study is based on a lecture by Dr. Bruce Waltke entitled The Hymnic Literature Part II. Before listening to the tape read the questions in this study and then answer the questions while listening to the tape.

1. Hebrew poetry is characterized by
2. List the three categories of Psalms:
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)
3. Psalm 40 is an _____ psalm.
4. List its main divisions.
5. What is the difference between a sacrifice and an offering?
6. Psalm 117 is a _____ psalm.
7. List its main divisions.
8. When we say that a particular psalm is a Messianic Psalm, what do we mean?
9. What are the important characteristics of a typical Messianic Psalm?
What caution is given?
10. What are the important characteristics of a typical prophetic psalm?
11. What are the important characteristics of a prophetic psalm?

Three Basic Benefits of the Psalms

*From the use of the Psalms both in ancient Israel and in the New Testament church we can see three important ways in which Christians can use the Psalms. **First**, it must be remembered that the Psalms are a guide to worship. By this we mean that the worshiper who seeks to praise God, or to appeal to God, or to remember God's benefits, can use the Psalms as a formal means of expression of his or her thoughts and feelings. A psalm is a carefully composed literary preservation of words designed to be spoken. When a psalm touches upon a topic or theme that we wish to express to the Lord, our ability to do so may be enhanced by employing a psalm as an aid. It can help us express our concerns in spite of our own lack of skill to find the right words.*

***Second**, the Psalms demonstrate to us how we can relate honestly to God. Although they do not so much provide doctrinal instruction on this point, they do give, by example, a true sort of instruction. One can learn from the Psalms how to be honest and open in expressing joy, disappointment, anger, or other emotions.*

***Third**, the Psalms demonstrate the importance of reflection and meditation upon things that God has done for us. They invite us to prayer, to controlled thinking upon God's Word (that's what meditation is), and to reflective fellowship with other believers. Such things help shape in us a life of purity and charity. The Psalms, like no other literature, lift us to a position where we can commune with God, capturing a sense of the greatness of His Kingdom and a sense of what living with Him for eternity will be like. Even in our darkest moments, when life has become so painful as to seem unendurable, God is with us. 'Out of the depths' (Ps.130:1) we wait and watch for the Lord's deliverance, knowing we can trust Him in spite of our feelings. To cry to God for help is not a judgement on His faithfulness but an affirmation of it.*

"One must also remember that the psalms are not just any kind of poems; they are musical poems. A musical poem cannot be read in the same way that an epistle or a narrative or a section of law can be read. It is intended to appeal to the emotions, to evoke feelings rather than propositional thinking, and to stimulate a response on the part of the individual that goes beyond a mere cognitive understanding of certain facts. Each of the types of psalms is also intended to have a given function in the life of Israel. Finally, each psalm must be read as a literary unit. The Psalms are to be treated as wholes, not atomized into single verses or thought of, as often happens with the Proverbs, as so many pearls on a string, each to be enjoyed for its own delight apart from its relationship to the whole. It is helpful in reading to follow the flow and balance of a psalm. Each psalm has a pattern of development by which its ideas are presented, developed, and brought to some kind of conclusion.

Old Testament Poetry is characterized by:

1. Synonymous parallelism. The second or subsequent line repeats or reinforces the sense of the first line, as in Isaiah 44:22:

*"I have swept away your offenses like a cloud,
your sins like the morning mist."*

2. Antithetical parallelism. The second or subsequent line contrasts the thought of the first, as in Hosea 7:14:

*"They do not cry out to me from their hearts,
but wail upon their beds."*

3. Synthetic parallelism. The second or subsequent line adds to the first line in any manner which provides further information, as in Obadiah 21:

*"Deliverers will go up from Mount Zion
to govern the mountains of Esau.
And the kingdom will be the Lord's."*

TYPES OF PSALMS

Laments

Laments constitute the largest group of psalms in the Psalter. There are more than 60, including individual and corporate laments. Individual laments (e.g., 3, 22, 31, 39, 42, 57, 71, 120, 139, 142) help a person to express struggles, suffering or disappointment to the Lord. Corporate laments (e.g., 12, 44, 80, 94, 137) do the same for a group of people rather than for an individual

Thanksgiving or Acknowledgment Psalms

These psalms were used, as the name suggests, in circumstances very opposite from those of the laments. Such psalms expressed joy to the Lord because something had gone well, because circumstances were good, and/or because people had reason to render thanks to God for His faithfulness, protection, and benefit. The thanksgiving psalms help a person or group express thoughts and feelings of gratefulness. In all, there are six community (group) psalms of thanksgiving (65, 67, 75, 107, 124, 136), and ten individual psalms of thanksgiving (18, 30, 32, 34, 40, 66, 92, 116, 118, 138) in the Psalter.

Hymns of Praise

*These psalms, without particular reference to previous miseries or to recent joyful accomplishments, center on the praise of God for who He is, for His greatness and His beneficence toward the whole earth, as well as His own people. God may be praised as Creator of the universe as in Psalms 8, 19, 104, and 148. He may be praised as the protector and benefactor of Israel, as in Psalms 66, 100, 111, 114, and 149. He may be praised as the Lord of history as in Psalms 33, 193, 113, 117, 145—147. God deserves praise. These psalms are especially adapted for individual or group praise in worship.
(The above taken from the book "How to Read The Bible For All It's Worth")*

INTRODUCTION TO THE PSALMS

STUDY III

READ:

Psalm 94

1. Into what classification would you put this psalm?
2. What type of parallelism is used?
3. Identify the problem being presented to God.
4. List the attributes of God on which the psalmist bases his petition.
5. On what misconception are the actions of the wicked based?
6. Put the argument of verses 8—11 in your own words.
7. What is the acknowledged source of blessing?
8. Explain why this is true and, if possible, provide an example from your own experience.
9. Why is the psalmist confident?
10. Explain the meaning of the expression "my foot is slipping" (NIV) "*my foot slippeth*" (KJV).
11. The psalmist praises God for _____?
12. What is the result when leaders are corrupt?
13. a) Why does the psalm close with the idea of retribution?
b) In what circumstances would this be appropriate today?
14. Come prepared to discuss if you should take a stand against evil doers today and if so, in what circumstances.

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STUDY IV

READ: Psalm 139

1. How would you classify this psalm?
2. Identify the type of parallelism used.
3. List the attributes of God being considered in this psalm.
4. What proof is offered to support the opening statement: "*O Lord you have searched me and known me.*" (vs. 1-6)
5. What are we forced to acknowledge on the basis of vs. 7—12?
6. What are the key words of vs. 13—16?
7. Is the psalmist view of his origin the same or different from yours?
8. Should the perspective expressed in these verses affect your opinion on the pro choice or pro life debate now being argued in Canada?
Why or why not?
9. The writer finds delight in God's thoughts toward him. What are some of the things for which we can praise God?
10. Are there circumstances in which the attitude of vs. 19—22 are appropriate today? Provide an illustration.
11. The psalm closes with two petitions. What did the psalmist expect to happen as a result of his prayer?
13. By what process does God now respond to prayers of this kind?

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STUDY V

READ: Psalm 103

1. How would you classify this psalm?
2. What type of parallelism is being used?
3. Define the word "*praise*" (NIV) or "*bless*" (KJV)
4. What attribute of God first moves David to praise the Lord?
5. What does this passage indicate as one of the reasons for neglect of praise to God?
6. Before proceeding to consider the detailed reasons for praising the Lord, given in this psalm, make your own list of benefits for which you are thankful.
7. Now list the benefits for which David thanks the Lord.
8. What are the similarities between the lists?
9. What are the differences between the lists?
10. Which of the blessings acknowledged in this psalm are directly connected to God's covenant with Israel?
11. How does the psalmist describe man's life?
12. How does the brevity of man's life compare with God's love?
13. Are the benefits of God's love unconditional? Explain.
14. Why does the acknowledgment that God's throne is established in Heaven lead to praise?

INTRODUCTION TO THE PSALMS STUDY VI

READ: Psalm 22

1. How would you classify this psalm?

2. What type of parallelism is being used?
3. Identify the problem being faced by the psalmist.
4. On what is his expectation of an answer from God based?
5. What does he commit himself to do when God answers his prayer?
6. What is the extent of the blessing expected?
7. Read the account of Jesus' crucifixion in Matt. 27 and list all the statements made in Ps.22 which are fulfilled in Christ.
8. Are there any other statements made in this psalm that are said in the New Testament to be fulfilled in Christ?
9. Why is praise an appropriate response to God's provision for us?
10. Under what obligation are those who have experienced God's blessing?
11. List ways in which the obligation can be fulfilled today.
12. Reread the psalm and then choose the section which to you most clearly expresses the grace of God.

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STUDY VII

READ: I Chronicles 16:1—36 Psalm 105

Note: The psalm of thanksgiving in I Chronicles 16:7—36 is incorporated in Psalm 105:1—15 and Psalm 96, and Psalm 106:47—48. All three are psalms of thanksgiving.

1. What type of parallelism is used in this psalm?

2. Why are we to give thanks to the Lord?
3. Why does the psalmist stress the importance of remembering the past works of God?
4. What is God's activity on behalf of Israel based on?
5. What was promised?
6. From the life story of Joseph the psalmist chooses what event as the turning point of his life?
7. What is the purpose of recalling Israel's experience in Egypt?
8. List the provisions made by God for his people in the wilderness.
9. What is God's provision based on?
10. What was God's purpose for his people?
11. Suggest some practical ways in which we can make thanksgiving a regular part of our lives