



LESSON 10

PSALMS: THE SONGBOOK OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The book of Psalms is the best known and most loved part of the Old Testament. It has been a source of comfort to millions of Bible readers for three thousand years. The name for Psalms in the Hebrew Bible is “Tehillim” which means “praise.” Our English word “psalms” comes from the Greek word “psalmoi” which originally meant a song or poem sung with instrumental accompaniment. By New Testament times, however, the word simply meant to “sing a hymn; to celebrate the praises of God in song” (Thayer’s Greek Lexicon, page 675).

The Jews often divided the Old Testament into three sections:

1. the Law, which included the first five books;
2. the Psalms which included all the books of poetry and wisdom literature;
3. the Prophets which included the books of the prophets as well as the books of history (*Luke 24:44*).

The Jews sometimes called the book of Psalms simply “David” because David wrote more of them than anyone else (*Hebrews. 4:7; Psalms. 95:7,8*).

The Psalms were written by several different writers. They were composed during a period of about one thousand years from the time of Moses (about 1500 B.C.) to the time of Ezra (about 450 B.C.). Moses wrote one psalm (*Psalms 90*). Asaph wrote two. The sons of Korah are credited with eleven psalms. Solomon and Ezra are believed to have written two psalms each. David is the author of at least seventy psalms (*2 Samuel 23:2; Acts 1:16; Matthew 22:41-46*). We do not know who wrote about fifty of the psalms. Possibly David wrote many of them. The Jews believed Ezra was the one who collected all the psalms together into one book.

The New Testament quotes from Psalms more than from any other Old Testament book. There are at least ninety-three direct quotations from Psalms in the New Testament. There are many references to Psalms also. Many of the psalms foretold the coming of Jesus Christ.

Beginning in ancient times, the book of Psalms has been divided into five “books” or sections. Book I includes the first forty-one psalms. Book II includes Psalms 42 to 72. Book III contains Psalms 73 to 89. Book IV contains Psalms 90 to 106. Book V is made up of Psalms 107 to 150.

Psalms is the longest book in all the Bible. It has 150 chapters. Psalms also contains the longest chapter in the Bible. This is Psalm 119, which has 176 verses.

The shortest chapter in the Bible is Psalm 117, which has only two verses in it.

Some people have argued that it is acceptable to use instrumental music in our Christian worship because it is mentioned so often in the book of Psalms. They forget that Psalms is a part of the Old

Testament. The Old Testament or Old Covenant was fulfilled by Jesus Christ (*Matthew 5:17,18; Luke 24:44*). Once it was fulfilled, it was removed as a law for God's people (*Colossians 2:14; Galatians 3:23-25*). Jeremiah had foretold this six hundred years before Christ was born (*Jeremiah 31:31-34*). Today, we live under the New Testament or New Covenant which was given by Jesus Christ (*Hebrews 7:12; Hebrews 8:6-13*). We follow the New Testament pattern for worship. This pattern commands us to sing (*Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16*). It leaves out instrumental music. There is no more authority for us to use instrumental music in our worship today than there is for offering animal sacrifices, dancing, burning incense, or worshiping on the sabbath day (Saturday).

There are many well known psalms. One of the best known and most beautiful is *Psalms 8*. It praises the glory of God as seen in His creation. It also exalts man as the highest of all God's creation. Matthew Fontaine Maury, the father of the science of oceanography discovered the "lanes of the sea" from this psalm. His son read Psalm 8 to him when he was sick. Verse 8 mentions "**the paths of the seas.**" Mr. Maury is reported to have said: "If God's Word says there are paths in the seas, they must be there. I will find them." He found the currents in the oceans which are followed by ships today. Probably the best known and best loved of all the psalms is *Psalms 23*. This is often called "the shepherd's psalm." It has likely been memorized by more people than any other chapter in the Bible. It is often read at funerals and other occasions of sadness.

Psalms 51 is believed to have been written by David after his sin with Bathsheba (*2 Samuel 11, 12*). It states his repentance for his sin against God. Verse 5 is wrongly translated in the New International Version in order to teach that David was born a sinner. This is a false doctrine. Sin is not inherited from one's parents (*Ezekiel 18:20*). Sin is a result of transgressing (breaking) God's law (*1 John 3:4*). When David wrote, "**...in sin my mother conceived me...**" he did not mean he received his mother's sin. He is simply saying he was born into a world of sin, or a sinful environment.

Psalms 90 was written by Moses who lived to be 120 years old (*Deuteronomy 34:7*). The psalm deals with the brevity of man's life on earth. Man's few years are compared with God who is eternal. Because of the brevity and weakness of our existence on earth, we are commanded to "**number our days.**" This means that we should use our opportunities in this life to the very fullest.

Another well known and beloved psalm is *Psalms 119*. This psalm praises the law of God. It is divided into 22 sections in the Hebrew Bible. Each section begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The sections are in alphabetical order.

Psalms 139 was written by David. It emphasizes that God is omnipresent (everywhere) and omniscient (knows everything). There is nothing hidden from God. There is no place that man can go to escape from God (*2 Chronicles 16:9; Proverbs 15:3*).

Many of the psalms are known as "Messianic psalms" because they foretold the coming of the Messiah (Christ). The second psalm is the first. It was applied to Jesus by Paul in his sermon in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia (*Acts 13:31-33*).

Psalms 16 was also quoted by Paul in the same sermon in Antioch (*Acts 13:35-37*). This psalm foretold the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. On the day the Lord's church began, the apostle Peter also used *Psalms 16* to prove that God had raised Jesus from the dead (*Acts 2:24-33*).

Psalms 22 is one of the greatest of the Messianic psalms. It was written by David one thousand years before Jesus was born. But it clearly describes the crucifixion of Christ. The first verse was fulfilled in *Matthew 27:46*. Verses 6 to 8 were fulfilled in *Matthew 27:39-44*. Verses 14, 15 describe the pain and suffering of one who is being crucified. Verse 16 tells of Jesus being nailed to the cross. Verse 17 prophesied that none of Jesus' bones would be broken. This was fulfilled in *John 19:31-37*. Verse 18

foretold that the soldiers would gamble for the clothes of Jesus (*John 19:24*).

Psalm 110 is a Messianic psalm. It was written by King David (*Matthew 22:41-46; Acts 2:34*). It does not refer to anything in David's life. It is wholly a prophecy of the coming of the Christ. This psalm foretold the power and the priesthood of Christ. The writer of the book of Hebrews in the New Testament quotes from this psalm to prove that Christ was a high priest "after the order of Melchizedek" (*Hebrews 5:5,6*). Melchizedek is mentioned only three times in the Bible. Abraham offered tithes to this man who was both king and priest (*Genesis 14:18-20*). One thousand years later, David prophesied that Christ would be a priest after the order of Melchizedek (*Psalm 110:4*). Then one thousand years after this, the New Testament records the fulfilment of the prophecy in Jesus Christ.

The book of Psalms is truly the songbook of the Old Testament. Millions of people have found comfort and strength in its inspired poetry.