**The Book of Psalms—Study Guide (Introduction & Psalms 1-7)**

The Bible always takes precedence in our study of God’s Word (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21). This guide is just a “help” compiled from the Soncino commentary, Ambassador College notes, & personal study.

**An introduction to the Psalms:**

The “Book of Psalms” in Hebrew is: “Sefer Tehillim,” which means: “Book of Praises.” The meaning of the rootword (Psalms) in both Greek and Hebrew is to play instrumental music, and then to sing to musical accompaniment. The book may be fairly described as the hymnal of the Temple. The Book is mentioned by name in the New Testament. See: Luke 20:42, Acts 1:20; and Luke 24:44.

**There are at least eight different men noted in the titles of the Psalms:**

* Of the 150 Psalms, David is mentioned 73 times. “Of David” can mean by him or pertaining to him. David acknowledged that his words were inspired by God. See 2 Samuel 23:2: “The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue.” (See also 2 Peter 1:21).
* The sons of Korah authored 11 Psalms. (Korah was the son of Kohath, a Levite: 1 Chronicles 6:22).
* Asaph authored 12 Psalms. (Asaph was a Levite and a singer: 1 Chronicles 6:32-33, 39).
* Moses wrote Psalms 90 and 91. King Solomon authored Psalms 72 and 127.
* Heman the Ezrahite (Psalm 88) and Ethan the Ezrahite (Psalm 89). They were wise men. See 1 Kings 4:31.
* Jeduthun (a musician and Levite—see 1 Chronicles 25:1, 3) is noted in the titles of Psalms 39, 62, and 77.

**The book of Psalms is divided into 5 books:**

* Book 1: Psalms 01-41
* Book 2: Psalms 42-72
* Book 3: Psalms 73-89
* Book 4: Psalms 90-106
* Book 5: Psalms 107-150

**Hebrew literary features found in the Psalms:**

**1. Doxologies**: “Expressions of praise and blessings to God.” Psalms 41:13; 72:18-20; 89:52; 106:48; 150:1-6. (It is interesting to note that each of these verses concludes one of the books within the Psalms).

**2. Acrostics**: “Method of organizing poems according to the Hebrew alphabet—22 letters Aleph through Tau.”

Psalm 119: This is the largest acrostic. Each section of eight verses starts with a different letter of the alphabet.

In Psalms 25, 34 and 145, each verse begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Psalms 9, 10, 37, 111 and 112 all contain partial acrostics.

**3. Parallelisms:** “Parallel ideas found in the same verse/s.”There are three different types of parallelisms.

* Synonymous**:** Same thoughts are presented, but in different words: Psalm 15:1: “Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?” See also Psalm 2:3 and Psalm 103:13.
* Antithetic: Opposite ideas are presented in the same verse/s: Psalm 1:6: “For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish.” See also Psalms 9:6-7; 90:6. Also Proverbs 21:1-2.
* Synthetic: Thoughts build up line by line to a cumulative effect: Psalm 1:1: “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful.”

**Types of Psalms/Hymns:**

*Worship*: Psalm 105; *Victory*: Psalm 68; *Zion:* Psalms 46-48; *Joy*: Psalm 98; *Help:* Psalm 74; *The Sabbath*: Psalm 92; *Thanksgiving:* Psalm 116; *Royal and Wedding:*  Psalm 45; *To call curses upon:* Psalms 35, 109, 137; *Messianic*: Psalms 2, 16, 22, (Psalm 110:1—is quoted in Matthew 22:41-46) *Pilgrimage/Songs of Ascents:*  Psalms 120-134 (These Psalms were sung from the Feast of Trumpets to Feast of Tabernacles).

**BOOK ONE: (Psalms 1-41).**

**Psalm 1: The introduction to the Psalms: Two ways of life are presented—the godly and the ungodly.**

1-2: Blessed (Hebrew: happy) is the man who avoids association with evildoers. He does not walk, stand or sit like them, but his delight is in the law of God upon which he meditates—thinks upon regularly as by habit. See Joshua 1:8, Psalm 119:97.

3: He is like a tree planted by rivers of water, drawing moisture from a constant source. (A godly man derives strength of purpose from the unfailing Spirit of God). He won’t wither and will ultimately succeed. A similar imagery of this verse is found in Jeremiah 17:7-8.

4-5: The wicked are not like a tree, but are like chaff that the wind carries away. See also Job 21:17-18. The wicked shall not do well in the judgment. Sinners shall not stand in the congregation of the righteous.

6: The Lord knows (regards) the way of the righteous (godly), but the way of the ungodly will perish. An English historian, JA Froude, once wrote: “One lesson and only one history may be said to repeat with distinctness: that…in the long run it is well with the good; in the long run it is ill with the wicked.”

**Psalm 2: A continuation of the introduction to the Psalms: Discussion of the millennial reign of Christ.**

1-3: The question is asked: Why do the nations rage and the people plot a vain thing? (See Acts 4:25-27. Also in the future, people will plot a vain thing--Revelation 11:18; 17:12-14). The rulers will take counsel to go against the Lord and His anointed, saying, “let’s break their bonds.” They won’t want God or Christ to rule.

4-6: God, who sits in the heavens, will laugh and will speak to them in His wrath (Revelation 6:15-17). God will set up His King (Christ) in Zion. See Psalm 45:6-7; 48:1-2.

7-9: Christ acknowledges that God called Him, “My Son” (Hebrews 1:5, 5:5). God will give Him the nations for His inheritance and the ends of the earth for His possession. Christ will break the nations with a rod of iron (Revelation 2:27, 19:15).

10-11: The kings and the judges of the earth are instructed to be wise. They are to serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. (We are to do the same now—fear the Lord: Proverbs 19:23; 23:17).

12: “Kiss the Son” literally means to show homage in purity. It means to worship Him, lest one perishes when His wrath is kindled. Blessed are those who trust Him—this phrase goes back to Psalm 1:1. End of Introduction.

**Psalm 3: A Psalm of David when he fled from Absalom (2 Samuel 15:13-17).**

1-2: David acknowledged that many had risen up against him and those who were troubling him had increased. The hearts of the men of Israel had gone for Absalom. Many said that David could not be helped, even in God. The term “Selah” is a pause. It was a musical notation. It gives time to reflect and think on what was just stated.

3-4: But, David knew that God was a shield (Genesis 15:1), and that God was his glory and the One who would lift up his head. (He and the others left Jerusalem with their heads covered—2 Samuel 15:30). David cried out to God, who heard him from His holy hill. Again, the term Selah is used.

5-6: David was able to sleep with confidence in God. When he awoke, David knew that God had sustained him. He would not be afraid, even of the ten thousands who set themselves against him all around (See Psalm 27:3).

7-8: David cried out to God to be saved. He noted that God strikes his enemies on the cheekbones and breaks the teeth of the ungodly (See Psalm 58:6). Salvation belongs to the Lord, and His blessing is on His people.

**Psalm 4: A Psalm of David (To the Chief Musician or Leader; with stringed instruments).** This Psalm is a continuation of the previous Psalm, when David fled from Absalom, and both were often sung together.

1: David acknowledged that his righteousness was from God (In Hebrew: “God of my vindication”), and he boldly asked Him to hear when he called. He acknowledged that God relieved him in distress and had mercy upon him and heard his prayers.

2: David asks the question to the sons of men: How long will they love worthlessness and seek after falsehood? (In the previous Psalm, men had followed Absalom, and they were being deceived).

3-4: God sets apart for Himself those who are godly, and God heard when David called upon Him. Be angry, but don’t sin (Ephesians 4:26-27). Meditate within your heart and be still—be calm. Selah.

5: Offer the sacrifices of righteousness (See Romans 12:1-2), and put your trust in the Lord. Also notice Psalm 107:22, and Hebrews 13:15-16.

6: There will be many who ask “Who will show us any good?” David then asks the Lord to lift up the light of His countenance upon them. (This was part of the blessing Aaron and his sons spoke to Israel—Numbers 6:26).

7-8: God put more gladness in the heart of David than the joy men have over an abundant grain and wine harvest. David could lie down in peace and sleep. For God alone is the One who allows us to dwell in safety.

**Psalm 5: A Psalm of David (To the Chief Musician; with flutes—wind instruments).** In contrast to the prior Psalm, which was accompanied by stringed instruments. Soncino titles this Psalm, “A Morning Prayer.”

1-3: David asks God to hear his words, and to consider his meditation—his thinking. He points out that it is to his King (David’s King and Lord) that he will pray. It is to God that his voice is directed in the morning, before the secular activities of the day begin (Psalm 59:16; 88:13).

4-6: God does not take pleasure in wickedness, nor does evil dwell with God. The boastful and proud will not stand in His sight (see Proverbs 8:13; 1 Peter 5:5). God hates the workers of sin, and will destroy those who speak lies. He abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.

7-8: As for David, he would come into God’s house in the multitude of His mercy. In the fear of God, he would worship toward God’s holy temple. (This verse has been selected by the Jews for recital upon entering a synagogue). He asked God to lead him in His righteousness, and to make God’s way straight before his face.

9-10: David’s enemies had no faithfulness in their mouths. David asked God to pronounce them guilty, and that they would fall by their own counsel (likened to falling into a pit they have dug for the innocent—see Proverbs 26:24-28). He asked God to cast them out (which would have included Absalom) because they rebelled.

11-12: But, let all those who put their trust in God rejoice. Let them shout for joy because God defends them. Let those who love God’s name be joyful in Him. For God will bless the righteous; and with favor He will surround them as with a shield (the Hebrew word here refers to a full-length body shield). See Psalm 125:2.

**Psalm 6: A Psalm of David (To the Chief Musician; with stringed instruments, including an eight-stringed harp—which has a deeper tone than the viola).** Soncino titles this Psalm: “A Prayer in Sickness.”

1-3: David asks God not to rebuke or chastise him in His anger or displeasure (See Jeremiah 10:24). Sickness and illness could be one way God punishes for sin as He did to Israel for their sins (Deuteronomy 28:59-61). He asks for God’s mercy, and for healing. David’s bones and soul were troubled and asks God—how long?

4-5: Again, David asks to be delivered and saved for God’s mercies’ sake (God is full of mercy--Exodus 34:6). There is no remembrance of God in the grave, and who in the grave gives God thanks? See Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10.

6-7: David was weary with groaning. Due to the pains, he spent the night in tears, and his eye was wasting (dimming) because of grief. He was also under much stress from his enemies.

8-10: But, God was merciful and He heard David’s weeping and supplication. David asked that the workers of iniquity depart from him and that they be ashamed suddenly and greatly troubled.

**Psalm 7: A Meditation of David which he sang to the Lord concerning the words of Cush, a Benjamite**. (Meditation— “shiggaion,” means a song of irregular structure and of impassioned character. Cush could have been an adherent of Saul—a Benjamite: 1 Samuel 9:1). Soncino titles this: “Appeal to the Heavenly Judge.”

1-2: David asked God to protect and deliver him from those who persecuted him and were willing to tear him apart like a lion.

3-5: If David had done evil, or repaid evil to those who were at peace with him, or plundered others without cause, then he was willing to be pursued and be trampled to the earth, and have his honor laid in the dust. Selah.

(David had not sought to do evil, nor to take Saul’s life—see 1 Samuel 24:11-13).

6-7: David asks God to lift Himself up in His anger and judge the enemies. David notes that the congregation of peoples (all nations) will be summoned to God for judgment and they will surround God. So David asks God, for their sakes, to return on high to judge the enemies.

8: The Lord will judge the peoples, and David asks to be judged by his righteousness and integrity. (David knew that God was a righteous Judge—see Genesis 18:25).

9-10: David asked that the wickedness would come to an end, and that the just would be established. The righteous God tests our hearts and minds. See Jeremiah 11:20; 17:9-10. Our defense is dependent upon God. He saves the upright in heart.

11-13: God is a just God. He is angry with the wicked every day. He sharpens the sword and makes ready the bow and prepares instruments of death for the wicked. See Deuteronomy 32:39-42.

14-17: Sinners conceive trouble and bring forth lies. They make a pit for others but will fall into the ditch they made. The trouble he causes will return upon his own head (Whatever a man sows, he shall reap—Galatians 6:7-8). We are to praise the Lord according to His righteousness, and sing praise to His name--Lord Most High.