

How to Read and Pray the Psalms

Forest Hill Presbyterian Church

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Major Themes: The Psalms as Covenantal Songs, Battle Songs, Portraits of Christ, Liturgy for Worship, Private Devotion

Bridging the Gap: Cultural - Ancient Near-East vs. Modern America; **Chronological** - 1800 – 400 BC vs. 2016 AD; **Covenantal** - Before Christ vs. In Christ

Psalms as Covenantal Songs

- What is a Covenant? “A relationship that God sets up with us and guarantees by his word.” (*First Catechism*)
- The relationship between God and His people, in which He is our God and we are His people.
- “I will be their God and they shall be my people.” (see Jer. 31-32; Ezek. 11, 14; Zech. 8; Heb. 8; Rev. 21)

God's Part:

- He saves us.
- He adopts us.
- He blesses us.
- He protects us.
- He guides us.

Our Part:

- We respond to Him.
- We believe His promises.
- We love and worship Him.
- We obey His commands.
- We thank and glorify Him.

Covenant History: Psalms of Remembrance: God reminds His people of what He has done for them in the history Psalms. See Psalms 78, 105, 106, 135, 136

God the Deliverer: God's People Call to Him for Guidance, Protection and Deliverance. See Psalms 3, 4, 5 & many more.

Repentance & Forgiveness: God calls His people to repent of their disobedience and unfaithfulness. God's people respond in repentance. See Psalms 6, 50, 51, etc.

Covenant Psalms: The focus is on our relationship with God as His people. We celebrate or remember what God has done or ask Him to act on our behalf. He calls us to remembrance, repentance, obedience, faithfulness.

Battle Songs: The focus shifts from our relationship with God to our relationships with our enemies. With our enemies in mind, we turn to God for salvation, deliverance, victory.

- They remind us that we are engaged in a fight.
- They remind us that we are often outnumbered and seemingly without hope.
- They call us to confidence in God's strength and not our own.
- *Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God. –Psalm 20:7*
- Battle Psalms: 7, 10, 18, 20

Christ is the Psalms: Ultimately, the Psalms are about Jesus, just like the rest of Scripture. Jesus is presented in the Psalms as promised Messiah, the enthroned King, the perfect and eternal priest, the Righteous One who suffers unjustly and is vindicated, the Blessed One, and in many other ways . . .

Psalm 22: Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing. -vv. 16-18

Psalm 105: The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” . . . The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

Psalm 15: “LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous.”

Psalm 1: "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night."

Psalm 26: "Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have led a blameless life; I have trusted in the LORD without wavering."

Christ in the Psalms:

- Obedient Servant (Ps. 26)
- Blessed Man of God (Ps. 1, 112)
- The True Israel, Son of God (Ps. 2)
- The Suffering Servant (Ps. 22 & 69)
- The Righteous King (Ps. 45)
- Priest Forever (Ps. 105)
- Victorious Anointed One (Messiah) (Ps. 2)

Psalms as Liturgy: The Psalms were compiled and canonized for corporate worship. The Psalms teach us how we should approach God in corporate worship. The Songs of Ascents are a beautiful picture of what it means to approach God corporately in worship. (Ps. 120-134)

- Invocation (Ps. 86)
- Call to Worship (Ps. 95, 96, 103)
- Confession of Sins (Ps. 41, 51, 130)
- Assurance of Pardon (Ps. 130, 32)
- Hymn (Ps. 19, 103)
- Intercession (Ps. 123, 126, 53)
- Blessing / Benediction (Ps. 128)

Psalms in Personal Devotion:

- Honesty Before God
- Words for Our Groanings
- Confirmation of Our Feelings
- Fellowship Across the Ages
- A Response from God in All Circumstances

Bridging the Gap: Cultural

Ancient Near-East:

Pre-Industrial
Agricultural
Violent, Warring
Monarchical
Ritualistic
Simple?

Our Culture:

Post-Industrial
Commercial
Mostly Peaceful
Democratic
Idea-oriented
Complex?

Chronological Gap: Psalms written between 1800BC and perhaps 400BC. Nations & Kingdoms Have Changed. Vocabulary and References Have Changed

Covenantal Gap: The Psalms were written before Christ and look forward to the fulfillment of God's promises. Israel was a geo-political nation called by God to wage war against other nations. Israel had Temple worship with animal sacrifices.

Common Ground: The Same God: God remains the same, and His character does not change. **The Same World:** We really do inhabit the same world as the people of the Psalms. **The Same Kind of People:** We are God's people, trusting in His promises and prone to fear, struggling to obey while we battle sin. **The Same Covenant:** The covenant of the Psalms is our Covenant, as we are the children of Abraham by faith.