

May 29 : Scriptures Psalm 1-5

SUMMARY

When I became a born-again believer as a junior in High School, I began to read the Bible seriously. Up to that point, it was tough to get into it. The Bible seemed like a closed book to me. I would read some and then lose interest. It didn't seem to have any relevance to me. As a 9th and 10th grade student, I was more engaged with the Lord of the Rings trilogy than the Lord of the Book.

But a truly remarkable thing happened when I got honest with Jesus and asked Him to take over my life. The Bible came alive. After that beautiful Saturday in November 1975, I followed the reading plan my more mature fellow Christians recommended. It was simple. Each day I was to 1) read through a chapter of the Gospels, starting with Matthew, 2) read a chapter in Proverbs, and 3) read a Psalm. Three chapters. That's it. But did it ever speak to me! Some scriptures I memorized came from those days 40+ years ago when the text leaped off the page and into my head and heart.

I decided I wanted to mark the passages that spoke to me in particular. Today, I'm addicted to highlighters when I read books. Back then, it was Flair© pens in a multitude of colors. Joseph's coat had nothing on my collection of markers. When I read back through my High School Bible, I'm amazed at how much is underlined. Some chapters were utterly awash in a rainbow of lines. I loved the Psalms mainly because they are so rooted in emotion. As I read through them, I could see them quoted in other parts of the Bible and speak to previous ancient events like Israel crossing the Red Sea and Israel's struggle to remain faithful to God (something I could identify with as a new Christian). The Book of Psalms is a magnificent part of God's word.

What is the book of Psalms? The book of Psalms is part of the Bible's Wisdom Literature. According to GotQuestions.org, Wisdom Literature is "a category of literature in many cultures in the time of the Old Testament. Wisdom literature deals with the way the world 'works.' It can deal with the big philosophical problems and the smaller things that may be addressed with common sense... The wisdom literature of ancient Israel was unique in that God was recognized as the fountainhead of all wisdom. 'The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding' (Proverbs 9:10). Through common grace, people can gain a certain amount of wisdom about how to live in the world. There are unbelievers who know how to manage their money well, respond positively to difficult situations, and even respond to tragedy with strength and dignity. However, it is the Lord who created the world, and only He can give true insight into the way the world works, because His wisdom is seen in the light of eternity."

The Bible books classified as Wisdom Literature are Job (of course), Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs (Song of Solomon). As you probably realize right now, you've already had a taste of Wisdom Literature by reading through Job, which has a lot to say about earthly wisdom and God's wisdom.

Before we go *Cruisin' Through the Bible* in Psalms, I suggest you watch the short video from BibleProject.com/explore/video/psalms. It's an excellent overview of the whole book, and the narrator clearly shows how the book of Psalm is laid out. He also gives you some basic divisions and themes to watch for and helps you better appreciate what you're reading. Here are a few things from their overview.

The book of Psalms has 150 psalms (chapters) written by many authors – David, Solomon, Moses, Temple worship leaders, and anonymous persons. As you read through the Psalms, you'll notice it's split into five books (3-41, 42-72, 73-89, 90-106, 107-145). Psalms 1-2 are a type of prologue to the book, and Psalms 146-150 are a type of epilogue (see The Bible Project illustration in the video).

Psalm 1 is about meditating on the Torah, day and night, and the subject is God's Word. Psalm 2 is about the coming Messianic King. It's a great way to begin the book because God's Word and King are inseparably linked. In fact, Jesus is referred to as "The Word of God" in the Gospel of John, Jesus is the Author and Embodiment of God's Word, and He is the model after which we're to pattern our lives as we wait for the Messianic Kingdom to come.

One thing from The Bible Project's Psalm video I especially loved is the pattern that outlined the Hallel (the Psalms of Praise, 113-118), The Psalm of Torah's Glory (Psalm 119), and the Songs of Ascent (Psalms 120-136). The Songs of Ascent are psalms the travelers to Jerusalem spoke, sang, and chanted on their way to Jerusalem for Temple visits or spectacular national Feasts of the Lord celebrations. We'll focus on those when we get there.

Finally, the Psalms are written in two styles – Laments (sad) and Praise (happy). The video explains more; I'll point those out as we go along. Remember the themes about Torah and the Messiah, Lamentations and Praises, Faith for now, and Hope for the future.

Psalm 1. As the Bible Project points out, Psalm 1 is a psalm about righteous and wicked people and what sets them apart. The righteous man involves himself with God's word rather than in activities with the wicked. As a result, the person has a vibrant walk with

God, full of life and good works, and can bear up in times of trouble. It says, "Whatever he does prospers" (1:3). Does that mean the person will be wealthy? Perhaps. God can indeed bless people if He desires (see Job 42). But in Hebrew thinking, prosperity includes much more than material wealth. It consists of a life that's pleasing to God and others and a life that knows God's peace even during difficulties (like running out of gas or running out of money, or health issues).

On the other hand, the lives of the wicked are not like this because they don't embrace, read, and live God's word, which means they don't follow His ways or His path. Therefore, their lives get really messed up. Ultimately, they'll not make it through the time of God's judgment. Yes, this means that they won't be brought back to life to live with God forever after they die. They're done. That's not the case with the righteous, those who conform their lives to the counsel of God and make His word their cornerstone and guiding star. The psalm ends by affirming the Lord watches over the righteous to help them along the way, but the path of the wicked will lead to their ruin (1:6).

Psalm 2. This psalm is a Messianic Psalm. A *very* Messianic Psalm. It speaks of God and His Anointed One (2:2), His Son (2:7). For us Christians looking backward, this is a clear reference to Jesus, right? Well, yes, ultimately. But at the time of its writing, it's about God and Israel's king. All of Israel's kings were anointed, and in the manner of the day, a sovereign king would refer to His lesser vassal/servant/or covenant king as his "son." The vassal king would refer to his overlord, the greater king, as "my father." So, on the surface, this is a psalm about how the nations should submit to Israel's God and anointed king. But on a prophetic level, this psalm is about how *all the nations* will eventually submit to Israel's God and king. This is where Psalm 2 goes full-messianic. There has *never* been a king of Israel that has ruled all the world nations, but there will be when Jesus returns. And when that happens, the kings of the nations better learn God's instruction, revere and serve Israel's Messiah, and rejoice over Him. Otherwise, their rebellion will earn them a royal whoopin'.

Psalm 3. Many psalms have headings that tell us to which author the psalm is attributed. They also may have a note about an event or special occasion that the psalm commemorates or is to be used. Psalm 3 says David wrote it during his flight from his son, Absalom, during the palace coup (2 Samuel 15-18). To appreciate this psalm, make sure you've read the story first and then read the psalm. Psalm 3 is a great praise psalm even though it starts sounding like a lamentation. The upshot is even though David is facing a severe threat from his rebellious son (3:1-2), King David knows God is his shield and sustainer. The end of Psalm 3 is David's confidence that the Lord will stomp on his

enemies. Why? "Salvation belongs to the Lord; may Your blessing be on Your people" (3:8).

Okay, I just know you noticed it. What is this word, *Selah*, that we find at the end of the psalm? Long story short, despite a lot of scholarly disagreement, it appears to function as a "pause" in the text, stopping momentarily to let something sink in. It's like a well-placed rest in a classical piece where silence highlights what's just been heard—a "pause for effect" notation. Type "selah" in the gotquestions.org site search bar for more detailed information.

Psalm 4. This psalm of David was apparently written at night (4:4, 8) or as a nighttime psalm of assurance. According to the heading, David gave this psalm to the choir director to be sung with strings or harps. It's very similar to Psalm 3 in that David celebrates being freed from some enemy grasp ("affliction" here isn't about sickness but being trapped by enemies). Now that he's free, he "turns" and addresses "exalted men," those of high standing who are insulting him, perhaps by slander or malicious accusations (4:2). But David knows the Lord makes a firm separation between the faithful and those who aren't (the "exalted men"). Therefore, despite people panicking over the situation, David can sleep peacefully because he trusts the Lord (4:5), who keeps him safe (4:8).

Psalm 5. This psalm is another from David for the choir director, only this time it has a flute accompaniment. Whereas the previous psalm was a nighttime psalm, this one references the dawn (5:3). Perhaps this came from a morning "devotional" that David enjoyed. Reading through the text has the same flavor as Psalm 1, comparing the righteous (those who live with God) and the wicked (those who reject Him). There's an intro (5:1-3), God's treatment of the wicked and evil people, identified by how they don't follow God's Torah (5:4-6), and David's devotion to God by faithfully worshipping the Lord and walking in His ways (5:7-8). David declares how the wicked use deadly words and asks the Lord to sweep them away (5:9-10). But for David and the rest of the righteous, their protection comes by taking refuge in the Lord, who blesses and protects them from the wicked (5:11-12).

INSIGHT

My take-away from this section of psalms is the importance of God's Word in a believer's life (Psalm 1). It is *the* key to transforming us inwardly and outwardly and helping us stay strong through life as we do good for God. But it doesn't happen quickly. I've been a Jesus follower for over 40 years. Sometimes my spiritual and character growth has been rapid, but most times, it's as laborious as watching the fruit grow on trees over a long time. The key to the fruit-bearing, godly person of Psalm 1 is to plant oneself in God's

Word, drawing insight, wisdom, guidance, comfort, and examples to help us grow tall in the Lord as an example to the rest of the world of what a person looks like who lives like God would if He were a person.

May 30 : Scriptures Psalm 6-9

SUMMARY

Psalm 6. Starting with the heading, this is also from David for the choir director and a stringed accompaniment. But there's something new. It's to be presented according to *Sheminith* (Shem-ee-need). What the heck is that? No one's sure, but the root of the word is related to the word "eight," so it could have to do with an eight-string instrument, an eight-beat count, or some other musical direction. The HCSB commentary points out that this lament psalm is one of the seven "penitential" (regret/repentance) Psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143). Psalm 6 is a plea for God's mercy. David is in an intense situation. He describes it as terror affecting his whole being, and he cries out in distress over his condition, longing for it to be over (6:3). Evidently, David has done something he fears God is punishing for and appeals for the Lord's forgiveness and rescue (6:4). On what basis? The Lord's covenant love. And besides, how can the dead praise God (6:5)? How does David see the Lord rebuking and disciplining him? Via his enemies again (6:7). David had a lot of trouble with enemies during his life. Perhaps this was from his days when Saul persecuted him. Or it could relate to when Absalom was chasing him. Regardless, David pours out his heart and tears shamelessly, but then the Lord assures him He's heard David's cry (6:8). And with restored confidence (meaning "with faith"), David voices his conviction that his enemies will be rebuffed and terrorized rather than him.

Psalm 7. Psalm 7 is another Davidic psalm that the heading describes as a song. It's a *Shiggaion* (sheeg-guy-on), "perhaps a passionate song with rapid changes of rhythm, or a dirge." The heading is a bit cryptic, "concerning the words of Cush, a Benjaminite." It could be about what Saul or another Benjaminite said that shook David up. Given the context of David needing to be rescued from pursuers (7:1), it very well could have been during the Saul assassination attempts. David submits to the Lord by saying that if he's at fault, let his enemies catch him and trample him. The *Selah* here emphasizes the seriousness of David's offer to God. But if David is not at fault, he asks the Lord to hold court to judge his case (7:6-7). Like Job, David requests that the Lord judge him based on his righteousness and integrity. David knows the Lord judges the righteous and the wicked properly because He knows the thoughts and feelings of all who are part of the judgment. Therefore, because David knows he's in the right, his divine Judge will protect him. On the other hand, the Judge will go after the unrepentant and the wicked, again very similar to what we read in Job. For David, there's nothing left to do but praise God (7:17).

Psalm 8. Another Davidic psalm for the choir director. This one is to be played on the *Gittith*, an unknown type of musical instrument. For us musicians, it'll be fun to meet the Lord and ask Him what these things were and what they sounded like. Psalm 8 is a magnificent and powerfully vivid psalm that contrasts the majesty of the Lord with the lowliness of human beings. David has been meditating on the glory of the Lord and how exalted He is in all of His creation. I imagine it's like sitting on the edge of the Grand Canyon and soaking in its awesome grandeur or sitting in the middle of the deep wilderness and staring up at the sky with its billions of stars. Like Job in Job 42, when we get a perspective adjustment, sometimes, there's nothing we can say, or it all comes tumbling out like David's psalm. "God, you're so huge, and I'm a speck. Why do You care for us, much less bother with us?" And yet, we're now reminded of incredible realities. Though we're small, God created us to rule His earth (8:5-8; Gen. 1:28). Simply put, this fresh realization blows David's mind, and he can only respond by exclaiming how awesome God is throughout His entire creation!

Psalm 9. Davidic, for the choir director, *Muth-labben* (another unknown musical term that could refer to a tune or style, perhaps). David is gettin' his praise on here (9:1-2), and he's doing it with everything he's got, for the heart represents the core of one's being. So, what has David all worked up about the Lord? God's mighty works, specifically His judgments upholding David's cause by bringing to ruin his enemies, the nations, and the wicked (9:3-6). And while all this is happening, God sits on His throne, above everything, doling out justice with fairness and righteousness (9:7-10). Because He is the perfect judge, those who are unjustly oppressed, who know Yehovah as their God, find refuge in Him. They should sing because their Judge will hold those who commit bloodshed accountable, and Yehovah will bring justice to the afflicted (9:11-12)! It seems David is experiencing some enemy attack because he asks the Lord to deliver him (9:13-14). David affirms the Judge will act and prevail against the attacking nations and the wicked, and he asks the Lord to act!

INSIGHT

My Bible's heading for Psalm 8 says, "God's Glory, Man's Dignity." To think God would put human beings in charge of His creation is stunning. Knowing that we fell by rebelling against Him is appalling, and understanding that He would take such fallen and frail creatures as us and fix us up by saving and regenerating us is amazing. And to realize that we're still commissioned to take care of His creation for Him as His delegated team is humbling. As insignificant as we feel, it's encouraging to know God has given humanity great dignity among His entire creation to serve Him. Speechless.

May 31 : Scriptures Psalm 10-16

SUMMARY

Psalm 10. Whereas Psalm 9 is King David's declaration of the Lord as Judge who will take down his enemies, Psalm 10 is a lament over the Judge's seeming absence or inaction and the need for His justice. This lament is humanity's familiar cry throughout history. There are always evil people who seem to skate through life, exploiting their power to the detriment of anyone who gets in their way. And the innocent cry, "Why won't you intervene, Lord?" Sounds like something we just read in the book of Job, right? David's lament is, "In arrogance the wicked relentlessly pursue their victims." What's his request of the "distant" Judge? "let them be caught in the schemes they have devised" (10:2). What follows is a vivid description of wicked people as defined by their ungodly actions and attitudes. They act with impunity, arrogantly declaring that there's no God and no one will hold them accountable for their wickedness. Yes, there have definitely been people like that in the world, and we seem to have a plethora of them surrounding us today. Even with all the social media platforms and ways to expose their crimes and oppression, the wicked simply scoff at God or any justice at all. David pleads with God to act on behalf of the helpless (10:12-15) because He is the Almighty King who stands up for the vulnerable (the orphans and oppressed who have no protectors) "so that *mere humans* from the earth may terrify them no more" (10:18). What a great image, huh? Almighty God vs. mere humans. And the wicked think they'll get away from God? Right. They can deny Him all they want, but there will be no denying on the day they meet God face to face.

Psalm 11. This is a beautifully simple psalm. It's from David and written for the choir director. It's all about taking refuge in the Lord. Of course, we can't literally hide behind His presence, but our sense of security in which we find refuge comes from knowing Who He is, what He's doing, and what He'll do on behalf of those who trust Him. The first part of the psalm is David's declaration, "The Lord is my refuge, so why should I panic when I hear things, rumor or not? And even if it threatens the "foundations" (undefines – personal? Social? Kingdom?) and it seems the righteous can't do anything about it, no worries." Why? "The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord—his throne is in heaven" (11:4). Yup, God sits above *everything*. There is no threat that He cannot handle on our behalf. He's not some absentee God (as it seems to David at the beginning of the previous psalm). Yehovah is very much present *and watching* everything and everyone. Nothing escapes His eye. Therefore, He'll punish the wicked, and because He is righteous, He loves righteous deeds. The righteous will see His face meaning "experience God's favor or blessing" (HCSB commentary), which the wicked will not. This is a great psalm to

meditate on when things get crazy around us and we're tempted to panic or let fear paralyze us. It's a perspective-setting psalm.

Psalm 12. This Davidic psalm starts with the usual heading. David opens his psalm with the thought that it seems there aren't any faithful people left in the world. He sees nothing but people with flattering, lying lips and deceptive hearts (12:2). That's an interesting observation because Jesus said a person's inward wickedness comes out of their mouths, which defiles them (Matthew 15:18). In other words (pun intended), the mouth reveals a person's inward spiritual condition. David prays that the Lord would cut off those tongues and lips (12:3) that speak so boastfully because the wicked believe their words give them power and mastery over all (12:4). This is very true.

I've been appalled to see how many in today's media and politics lie and slander their opponents to the point where the innocent is crushed, their careers ruined, and their reputations are destroyed based on lies. The perps shut down the speech of others while using the same media and cry for "free speech" to establish their power and mastery over others. I've uttered a similar prayer to David's, "Oh Lord, would you just shut their mouths? Why do you let them do this?" Well, the wicked are gonna wicked, and their mouths are the fountainhead of their spiritual ugliness and contamination. Will the Lord do anything? *Yes!* "Because of the devastation of the needy and the groaning of the poor (victims of these evil people), I will now rise up (meaning God will take action)," says the Lord. "I will provide safety for the one who longs for it" (12:5). David then contrasts the words of the wicked with the Lord's words. God's words will guard and protect the righteous while the wicked walk aimlessly because they extol and revere sin.

Psalm 13. Ever feel like you're in a hopeless situation? David captures precisely what many of us go through at such times. We feel God is distant, our anxious thoughts race through our heads, and our enemies (worries, situations, fears, and yes, even actual human enemies) press their attack against us. And so, like David, we cry out for deliverance. David goes to the One who he knows can bring it – the Lord (13:3)! You can tell David is desperate because it's a "either You deliver me, or I'm done" prayer. But he's not ready to surrender. With a rock-solid trust in God's love for him, David declares the Lord will deliver him.

Psalm 14. Ever hear someone say, "I'm an atheist. There's no God." Well, they're a fool. Don't take my word for it. That's what David says in this psalm (14:1). And the word for "fool" here describes a person who is willfully and rebelliously oblivious of God, a person who purposefully rejects God's truth. As a result, the "fool" also means they're immoral, following their own ways and not the Lord's way. Therefore, they are "corrupt; they do

vile deeds." Not one person like this does "good" because they don't know the source of good (God) nor His words that tell us how to do good. But there *is* a God who looks down to examine every human being – fools included. "Seriously," writes David, "Are they that stupid? They go after my people like they're devouring bread. But when God turns the "dinner table" (14:7), those fools will panic as the Lord changes the situation. Then Israel will celebrate!

Psalm 15. This Davidic psalm is a gorgeous description of a godly person who can stand in God's presence. The first verse is parallelism, meaning the first half of the verse parallels the second half. Live = dwell and tent = holy mountain. This comparison sets the goal David desires to reach – living in God's presence, and the only person who can do that is the one who lives the way God wants them to live, do, and speak (15:2). Not only are they free from the negatives – don't speak damagingly, don't harm a friend, don't insult a neighbor – but they walk in God's positive commandments – they despise wickedness, honor the faithful, keep their promises, lend free of charge, and refuse to be bribed. Those people will have solid, stable lives (15:5).

Psalm 16. This psalm is also by David. The word *miktam* is another one of those unknown musical expressions. It could be related to the words "cover, secret, or inscribe" (HCSB commentary). Your guess is as good as mine. The psalm is David's testimony of confidence in the Lord and his dependence on Him (16:1). On the contrary, David points out those who were thought to have the same commitment to Yehovah but who rejected the Lord and turned to other gods (16:3-6). Yeah, David wants no part of them. Instead, David proclaims the Lord is the only God for him (16:5). The terms "boundary lines" and "my inheritance" (CSB) are land references and speak of something that belongs to someone in perpetuity. Back when Joshua divided up the conquered areas of Canaan, the land was divided between families. According to the Torah, the land must remain within each family line so no one would become landless, homeless, or destitute. Therefore, a piece of land was a person's true, solid inheritance. David says that the Lord is an even better, more solid inheritance than land and a better inheritance to hold onto than seeking other gods. Therefore, he will keep the Lord in mind at all times. And because the Lord is David's source of strength (at my right hand), he can live securely, making him glad and peaceful (16:8-9)! The close of the psalm is a remarkable statement, "For you will not abandon me to Sheol; you will not allow your faithful one to see decay. You reveal the path of life to me; in your presence is abundant joy; at your right hand are eternal pleasures" (16:10-11). It's fascinating because the idea of death in David's day was that the dead person would leave their body and descend into the earth just like the body is placed in the ground. The soul goes to Sheol, "the place where the dead dwell." Yes, they continue existing but in a disembodied state in what was thought of as gloom or likened

to sleep. Here, David proclaims that the Lord will not abandon him even in death but will restore him to life. How can this be? 1) David seems to be prophesying about a future resurrection of the dead, an idea that the Lord reveals to Daniel in Daniel 12:1. 2) When you get to the New Covenant scriptures, the writers (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) reveal this is a precise prophecy of Jesus' death and resurrection. In Jesus' day, the dead did not enter the state of decay (complete death from which no one can return) until the 4th day after dying. This is why Jesus raised Lazarus on the 4th day, and the body stunk, indicating no hope of coming back to life. But Jesus *raised Lazarus and completely restored his decaying body, proving He was the Lord of Life*. When Jesus died, He rose on the 3rd day to fulfill this scripture (and others). His Father didn't abandon Him to death but raised Jesus from the dead to show death has been beaten. David seems to get a glimpse of what's to come!

INSIGHT

In this series of Psalms, I keep coming back to the idea of God as our refuge. A refuge is "Protection or shelter, as from danger or hardship" (American Heritage Dictionary). As I mull this, refuge is something we seek when something outside of us threatens us. But I also see God as a refuge to protect us or shelter us from getting into danger or hardship because we're living in ways that invite trouble.

For example, when we're hit with troubles, we can imitate David and remind ourselves how much the Lord loves and cares for us. We remember how God helped so many of His people through seemingly impossible difficulties. You know, like crossing vast stretches of open water or feeding them miraculously by dropping food at their feet.

But we can take refuge in God by preventing trouble when we heed the wisdom of God's word. For example, God's word tells us to stay away from the person who's tempting you to cheat on your spouse, not tell a lie that you'll have to keep covering up for years to come, or living with the guilt of sinning against God or another person. God is our refuge from that which threatens us from outside and within. Thank God!