

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

First Quarter 2024: *The Book of Psalms*

Lesson 1 “How to Read the Psalms”

Read for this week’s study

1 Chronicles 16:7; Nehemiah 12:8; Psalm 25:1–5; Psalm 33:1–3; Romans 8:26, 27; Psalm 82:8; Psalm 121:7.

Memory Text

“Then He said to them, ‘These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.’ And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures” (Luke 24:44, 45, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. The Psalms in Ancient Israel’s Worship
- III. Meet the Psalmists
- IV. A Song for Every Season
- V. Inspired Prayers
- VI. The World of the Psalms
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Jon Paulien

1. The Bible is a book of many genres. It is full of stories, poems, songs, jokes, riddles, prophecies, and word plays, there are lots of puns, especially in the Hebrew. Scholars have said that in the Old Testament prophets, God almost always speaks in poetry. There is evidence that the Aramaic of what Jesus says in the Gospels is often poetic as well. What does all this tell us about God? (Sabbath Afternoon’s Lesson)
2. The word “Psalms” is from the Greek Old Testament (*psalmoi*). The main purpose of the Psalms were to praise God. They were written in Hebrew poetry by different authors from the ancient world, so the Psalms reflect the situations and the literary styles of their time. What does that tell us about the way that God chooses to reveal Himself to us? (Sabbath Afternoon’s Lesson)

3. From your previous reading and study, what are some of the different kinds of psalms you find in the Bible? (Sunday's Lesson)
4. Who wrote the Psalms? See Psalm 8:1; 42:1; 75:1; 89:1; 90:1. What are some of the human emotions expressed in the Psalms? Do you find the fact that many of the Psalmists express the same kinds of struggles we experience today encouraging or discouraging? (Monday's Lesson)
5. What different types of psalms have you noticed? Do an internet search for the characteristics of Hebrew poetry. Hebrew poetry isn't based on rhyme, so what is it that makes Hebrew poetry poetry? (Tuesday's Lesson)
6. Many of the psalms in the Bible are not found in the book of that name. Read 2 Samuel 23:1-4. What does this tell us about songs and prayers in the Bible? What does it tell us about God? What does Romans 8:26-27 tell us about prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit? (Wednesday's Lesson)
7. The world of the Psalms is totally God-centered. The psalmists sought to submit all life experiences, positive, negative, happy, and sad, to God in prayer. That means in a real sense, the psalms are worship from beginning to end. That was true for individual Israelites and for the community as a whole. All of Israel's experience was meant to be a form of worship. God was understood to be both far and near, everywhere at once, yet located in the temple, hidden, yet disclosed. Why do you think the Bible so often portrays God in terms of paradoxes and tensions between opposites? (Thursday's Lesson)
8. Most of the Psalms are associated with the time of David and the early monarchy. But the collection continued to grow after that time and may have been placed in the form we know today by Ezra, around 450 BC. See Ezra 7:6-10. These would have been collected in service of the new temple that had been established after the return from Babylonian Exile.

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

Now let's go to the Psalms. Is it clear who wrote all these hymns and prayers? It's not only David, is it? A number of other individuals are mentioned. Even one is by Moses, the ninetieth Psalm, with the memorable words: "Teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." It's obvious that we're reading verse here, that poets are at work. Though in Hebrew poetry you don't see a rhyme between the lines. What you see is parallelism. Sometimes there's even a third line that repeats the thought of the first one. Often the second line will clarify the thought in the first one.

When poets write, they are sometimes very dramatic. They express emotions very strongly. There's a lot of feeling, and so how literally should we take some of these verses? For example, Psalm 6:6, where he says: "I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears;

I drench my couch with my weeping. My eye wastes away because of grief, it grows weak because of all my foes.”

Do you think he really soaked it every night? Well, that’s the way poets picture things. The point, though, isn’t obscure about it. He was feeling very upset, very depressed, very discouraged, and he wept as he thought of his problem. We have a hymn that talks about “a worm such as I”. Do you always feel like a worm? When you have just received the best news in your life on your way to church and the hymn is about “a worm such as I”, you’ve never felt so good in your life. It pays to know the background of these hymns. Mr. Hammond, organist at La Sierra for so many years, has written another book on the background of hymns, and it’s well worth reading. And when you know the experience of the one who wrote the hymn, you can understand why he or she wrote that way.

Now some of our hymns don’t really bear too much theological analysis. Oh, you know the one about prayer we often have? “I’ll sing while passing through the air, farewell, farewell, sweet hour of prayer.” And if prayer is conversation with God as with a friend, as demonstrated in the Psalms, would you sing while passing through the air, “God, I’ll never speak to You again”? We’re just on our way to talk to Him face to face. Well, one has to understand what was meant, that that would be the end of praying to an unseen person or praying formally. And yet even prayer on this planet is supposed to be conversation with God as with a friend. So if you understand prayer that way, how could you sing, “Farewell, farewell, sweet conversation with God as with a friend”? So whoever wrote that had some other conception of prayer. Even that highly emotional and very sentimental song, “I come to the Garden alone, and He walks with me, and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own,” and some men find that altogether too sentimental to sing. Until you read the story of the one who wrote it, a person who felt very warm, very close to God at the time and expressed it this way. And when people are expressing their feelings, that’s a highly individual matter, isn’t it? We have to leave them free to do it their way and make lots of allowances for it. However, when people are expressing their feelings, one had better hear them through, because a person might express extreme depression for a little while and then say, “However, I’ve thought this through.” {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God in All 66 – Psalms*, recorded January 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

*Audio links to the West Covina series recorded in 1984:

<http://pkp.cc/27MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/28MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

Further Study with Ellen White

It is for our own benefit to keep every gift of God fresh in our memory. Thus faith is strengthened to claim and to receive more and more. There is greater encouragement for us in the least blessing we ourselves receive from God than in all the accounts we can read of the faith and experience of others. {DA 348.2}

With the trusting faith of a little child, we are to come to our heavenly Father, telling Him of all our needs. He is always ready to pardon and help. The supply of divine wisdom is inexhaustible, and the Lord encourages us to draw largely from it. {3BC 1146.8}

Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. The eye of faith will discern God very near, and the suppliant may obtain precious evidence of the divine love and care for him. {GW 257.1}

God calls upon His creatures to turn their attention from the confusion and perplexity around them and admire His handiwork. As we study His works, angels from heaven will be by our side to enlighten our minds and guard them from Satan's deceptions. {CT 457.1}

Never are we absent from the mind of God. God is our joy and our salvation. {3SM 338.1}

The Lord is our helper, our defense. God has provided that no soul that trusts in Him shall be overcome by the enemy. {CTr 47.4}

We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and his teaching in our past history. {RH, October 12, 1905 par. 22}

Prayer is a heaven-ordained means of success. Appeals, petitions, entreaties, between man and man, move men and act a part in controlling the affairs of nations. But prayer moves heaven. That power alone that comes in answer to prayer will make men wise in the wisdom of heaven and enable them to work in the unity of the Spirit, joined together by the bonds of peace. {HP 75.6}

Unceasing prayer is the unbroken union of the soul with God, so that life from God flows into our life; and from our life, purity and holiness flow back to God. {SC 97.2}

[T]he prayer that comes from an earnest heart, when the simple wants of the soul are expressed just as we would ask an earthly friend for a favor, expecting that it would be granted—this is the prayer of faith. {ML 19.2}

In the secret place of prayer, where no eye but God's can see, no ear but His can hear, we may pour out our most hidden desires and longings to the Father of infinite pity, and in the hush and silence of the soul that voice which never fails to answer the cry of human need will speak to our hearts. {Pr 182.6}

We may utter words that reach the throne of the Monarch of the universe. We may speak with Jesus as we walk by the way, and He says, I am at thy right hand. [See Psalm 16:8.] {GW 258.1}

Divine wisdom will order the steps of those who put their trust in the Lord. Divine love will encircle them, and they will realize the presence of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. {OHC 324.6}

In the future life we shall understand things that here greatly perplex us. We shall realize how strong a helper we had and how angels of God were commissioned to guard us as we followed the counsel of the Word of God. {HP 257.3}

Our God is an ever-present help in every time of need. He is perfectly acquainted with the most secret thoughts of our heart, with all the intents and purposes of our souls. When we are in perplexity, even before we open to Him our distress, He is making arrangements for our deliverance. Our sorrow is not unnoticed. He always knows much better than we do, just what is necessary for the good of His children, and He leads us as we would choose to be led if we could discern our own hearts and see our necessities and perils, as God sees them. But finite beings seldom know themselves. They do not understand their own weakness. . . . God knows them better than they know themselves, and He understands how to lead them. . . . {OHC 316.4}

The Lord will not disappoint any who put their trust in Him. He will be first and last and best in everything to us. He will be a present help in every time of need. In these last days of service we shall ... be held, and led, and protected, by the power of Christ. May the Lord bless and strengthen you, that your last days may be your best days, fragrant with the softening, subduing influence of His love. The Lord bless and keep you and give you repose in His love, is my most earnest desire for you, my brother. - TSB 31-33 (Letter 70, 1898). {RY 112.1}

Our God is a very present help in time of need. He is acquainted with the most secret thoughts of our hearts, with all the intents and purposes of our souls. When we are in perplexity, even before we open to Him our distresses, He is making arrangements for our deliverance.—Letter 73, Feb. 1, 1905, to Drs. D. H. and Laurette Kress. {UL 46.6}

Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him. {SC 93.2}

The God of heaven is constantly at work. It is by His power that vegetation is caused to flourish, that every leaf appears and every flower blooms. Every drop of rain or flake of snow, every spire of grass, every leaf and flower and shrub, testifies of God. These little things so common around us teach the lesson that nothing is beneath the notice of the infinite God, nothing is too small for His attention. {8T 260.1}

It is the greatest joy of the angels of heaven to spread the shield of their tender love over souls who turn to God. {OHC 92.6}

How precious are these assurances that we shall never be left to take one step in our own finite strength, for He has said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Hebrews 13:5. We are fighting in the presence of invisible hosts. Unseen intelligences survey the whole array of evil, and help is at hand. We shall not only be provided with that which is necessary but shall be placed upon vantage ground. . . . {OHC 311.4}