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BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Psalms

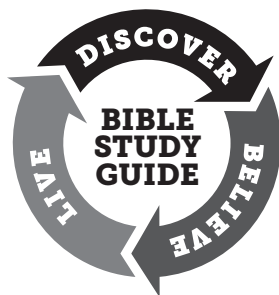
THE BELIEVER'S PRAYER BOOK

A STUDY OF PSALMS

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Introducing

Psalms

The Believer's Prayer Book

A Study of Psalms

If ever the opportunity arises, students of the Bible should try this experiment: find a piano, lift its lid upright, and sing into it. It does not matter which note they sing into it; they should merely sing into the piano for about five seconds. When they stop singing, something amazing happens: the piano “sings” back to them! The piano has found the note they sang; it has “struck a chord.”

The book of Psalms is like a piano. Since there are 150 songs in the book, one of them is bound to “sing” its way into the ears of the reader. Is someone ready to praise the Lord for who He is? There are psalms that are suitable (19, 66, 113). Does anyone need assistance focusing upon the Lord’s instructions? There are psalms that are ready to help (14, 37, 119). Could someone use a hand with how to rest in the Lord? There are more than a few to read (62, for example). Need to come clean from a sinful past? Many psalms will be of benefit (cf. Psalm 51).

Because the book of Psalms has such a variety of poems, there is bound to be one that “fits” the setting of life that readers find themselves in. What is more, these psalms have a way of “finding”

readers just at the most opportune moment. Although a person can read a particular psalm dozens of times and be unaffected by it, one life event can cause that person to read the same psalm anew and afresh. Whatever life throws into a person's way, there is a psalm for every occasion.

Background

The Book of Psalms is an anthology of 150 poems, and they are placed into five collections (books): 1–41, 42–72, 73–89, 90–106, and 107–150. Each collection begins with a lovely and fitting anthem, and it concludes with some kind of doxology and benediction. Although nearly half of the psalms are attributed to David, others are attributed to Asaph, the Sons of Korah, Ethan, Solomon, and Moses. Several psalms begin with a superscription, which contains hymn tunes, notes to the song leader, and helpful context. The oldest psalm is attributed to Moses (Psalm 90); the youngest was written in Babylon after 586 B.C. (Psalm 137).

There are five basic categories of psalms in the book. Hymns are the most simplistic, for they praise God for who God is. Thanksgiving psalms are more complex, for they praise God for what God has done. Lament psalms share the pain of the poet's heart, whether it be sin related, suffering induced, or emotionally burdened. Royal psalms have something to do with the king, be they coronations (2, 110), weddings (45), or prayers before battle (20). Wisdom psalms are poems about God's instructions, and the benefits of learning them.

Perhaps surprisingly, there are more lament psalms than any other within the book. However, it is comforting to know that one does not have to be in good spirits to speak with God. God

can take the pain of His children and transform it into something good.

Whatever the occasion, there is a psalm for it. It is therefore a great benefit for readers to get into the habit of reading a psalm each day.

Dr. Ken Gore

The Believer's Prayer Book

Many Christians struggle with how to pray and what to pray. The book of Psalms provides the individual believer and the Church a guide on how to praise, petition, and proclaim our Lord God. There are psalms of thanksgiving and joy, frustration and fear with cries for help. There are also psalms of praise to the always faithful God Almighty who hears His people's prayers and offers the encouragement, discipline, forgiveness, and comfort that each person needs.

The 150 psalms contained in the book of Psalms span the emotional and circumstantial gamut from joyful, hopeful, sadness, despair, frustration, anger, and fear. Since God inspired the composers' words of these psalms, He enjoys hearing His divinely inspired Words and ideas being communicated back to Him.

Just like in any relationship when one shares one's soul with another person, the relationship grows closer through developing trust and intimacy, which the Father desires of every believer. God appreciates words of praise, thanksgiving, petition, and confession. God wants to hear from His children. God wants to get to know us and for us to know Him. He has provided us with 150

Psalms to serve as The Believer's Prayer Book to communicate with Him.

Be encouraged to read and pray or even sing the Psalms daily. Since there are 150 psalms, you can read through and pray one Psalm a day over a 5-month period and have gone through the entire book. You will be encouraged and will grow closer to the Lord. Make the words personal and feel the emotions in each psalm. You will grow in your prayer life and faith and enjoy a more intimate relationship with God.

Suggested Resources for the Study of Psalms

Allen, Leslie C. *Psalms 101–150. Word Biblical Commentary Series.* Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983.

Arterbury, Andrew, W. H. Bellinger, and Derek S. Dotson. *Engaging the Christian Scriptures: An Introduction to the Bible.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014.

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Bullock, C. Hassell. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books.* Chicago, IL: Moody, 1988.

Craigie, Peter C. *Psalms 1–50. Word Biblical Commentary Series.* Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983.

Goldingay, John. *The Psalms.* 3 Volumes. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006, 2007, 2008.

Hilber, John W. "Psalms" in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, Vol 5. John H. Walton. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009.

Kidner, Derek. *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary on Psalms Series*. 2 Volumes. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973, 1975.

Longman, Tremper III. *Psalms. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014.

McCann, J. Clinton. "The Book of Psalms: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections" in *The New Interpreters Bible Commentary*, Vol IV. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996.

Tate, Marvin E. *Psalms 51–100. Word Biblical Commentary Series*. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1990.

Tucker, W. Dennis, Jr. and Jamie A. Grant. *Psalms, Volume 2. NIV Application Commentary Series*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018.

VanGemenen, William A. *Psalms. The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008.

Wilson, Gerald H. *Psalms, Volume 1. NIV Application Commentary Series*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002.

NOTE

¹ Listing a book does not imply full agreement by the writer or GC2 Press with all its comments.

Psalms

The Believer's Prayer Book

A Study of Psalms

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lesson 1



Sing and Shout to the Lord!

MAIN IDEA

When Christians truly comprehend what God has done, they will naturally respond with praise.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How do I praise the Lord?

STUDY AIM

To understand different ways people can praise the Lord

QUICK READ

Since God has delivered and restored those who have faith in Him, Christians offer enthusiastic praise in response.

Introduction

Exodus 14:15–31 is the climax of the Exodus story. Moses and the people camped at Pi Hahiroth, with the Red Sea in front of them and mountains on either side. Suddenly, the sound of approaching chariot wheels sent waves of panic throughout the entire camp. Moses, realizing there was no way to escape, looked up and cried out to God. At that moment, the simplest yet the most profound thing happened: God answered Moses's prayer. God suddenly sent a wind that opened the Red Sea, and the nation walked across on dry land. God turned panic into praise.

Psalm 66 looks back on the events of the Exodus as a way of re-inspiring praise to God, who continues to open our modern-day Red Seas. This story and all the stories recorded in Scripture, stand as a constant reminder to the Church, and countless generations, to join in the celebration of God's miraculous deeds both past and present. Although we were not physically present at the Red Sea to see this movement of God or walk beside the children of Israel, nevertheless, spiritually we can take part in singing, shouting, and praising God for once again delivering His people. The call to sing and shout to the Lord is a call to remember and rejoice because of God's miraculous deeds past and present.

Psalm 66:1–20

¹ Shout for joy to God, all the earth! ² Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious. ³ Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies

cringe before you. ⁴ All the earth bows down to you; they sing praise to you, they sing the praises of your name.”

⁵ Come and see what God has done, his awesome deeds for mankind! ⁶ He turned the sea into dry land, they passed through the waters on foot—come, let us rejoice in him. ⁷ He rules forever by his power, his eyes watch the nations—let not the rebellious rise up against him.

⁸ Praise our God, all peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard; ⁹ he has preserved our lives and kept our feet from slipping. ¹⁰ For you, God, tested us; you refined us like silver. ¹¹ You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. ¹² You let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance.

¹³ I will come to your temple with burnt offerings and fulfill my vows to you— ¹⁴ vows my lips promised and my mouth spoke when I was in trouble. ¹⁵ I will sacrifice fat animals to you and an offering of rams; I will offer bulls and goats.

¹⁶ Come and hear, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me. ¹⁷ I cried out to him with my mouth; his praise was on my tongue. ¹⁸ If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; ¹⁹ but God has surely listened and has heard my prayer. ²⁰ Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!

A Universal Invitation (66:1–4)

In game six of the 1975 World Series, Carlton Fisk stepped to the plate, hoping to do the improbable, forcing a seventh game against the Cincinnati Reds. Carlton Fisk swung, and the crack of the bat filled the ballpark. Carlton Fisk dropped the bat and

began yelling and waving his arms, shouting, as if to say, “Stay fair, stay fair.” That day, Carlton Fisk became a baseball legend. Although this game happened in 1975, sports fans watching replays of this iconic event cannot prevent themselves from waving their hands, along with Carlton Fisk.

Psalm 66 is a universal call to the people of God to sing and shout to the Lord because He continues to do the impossible. Although there are multiple ways to outline its twenty verses, the simplest way is to divide the Psalm around the phrase “Come and See.”

The writer opened with a universal invitation (all the earth!) to sing and shout to the Lord. This call is universal because it is not based on any single action of God, nor God’s involvement with any individual. Although later the writer highlighted events from the Exodus experience, in the opening verses, everyone is invited. Their individual experiences or encounters with God are not designed to separate individuals but to call the masses together to create a united voice of praise and worship. This universal call to praise God is one of invitation.

This call is different from Philippians 2:9–11, which is not one of invitation but of compulsion. During the second coming of Jesus Christ, everyone, regardless of their relationship with God, will be required to revere God. In contrast, today the invitation is freely given and must be freely accepted. The call to salvation and the call to uplift the name of the Lord are both invitations and can be accepted or rejected. Are you willing to join in and sing and shout to the Lord because of what He has done, is doing, and will do in your life?

An Exciting Invitation (66:5–15)

The call is qualified. The singing and shouting that is directed to God must also be worthy of God. Sound is measured in decibels and is used to determine the intensity or volume of noise. Verse 5 presents an invitation, “Come and see,” similar to, the Samaritan woman in John 4, who ran throughout the community shouting, “Come and see a man.” In verse 5, as in John 4:29, the emphasis is placed on the deeds of God. “Come and see what God is doing throughout the world” (writer’s paraphrase). In the Exodus story, the crossing of the Red Sea is the central miraculous event, symbolizing God’s power. This miraculous event, according to verses 6–7, provides humankind with two spiritual truths. For believers, God can open closed doors, and whenever things look impossible, God will intervene according to His purposes.

The Red Sea was a closed door, preventing the children of Israel from fully embracing their freedom waiting for them in the promised land of Canaan. In contrast, once the door was opened and the Israelites were safely across, what appeared to be an open door for Israel became a closed door for the Egyptian army. God used the same sea to deliver Israel and to destroy the Egyptian military. What a fantastic experience it must have been to see the Red Sea split open and the Israelites walking through on dry ground (Exodus 14:21–22). A fact that is easily overlooked is that God not only opened the sea, but He also made the ground fit for travel. The Israelites were able to easily navigate the bottom of the sea, which had been submerged and muddy since the Red Sea was formed. In an instant, God reversed in an unimaginable amount of time, transforming an uncrossable sea into an easily

traversed highway. At that moment, the singing and shouting to the Lord must have been deafening, as the nation walked safely and securely through the sea. Today, the writer is inviting present-day readers, modern-day Red Sea crossers, to join in and celebrate this miraculous event.

Why did the writer of Psalm 66 recount the crossing of the Red Sea and connect it with singing and shouting to the Lord? The reason is that the deeds of the Lord are worthy of adoration and praise from the moment they are experienced into eternity. The writer draws on the Exodus experience to reinforce the idea that the Lord's past deeds should continue to inspire praise. Any cursory review of any denominational hymnal illustrates that the past deeds of the Lord, such as "Joshua Fought the Battle of Jericho," "God Put a Rainbow in the Sky," and "Down at the Cross," serve as a bridge from the past to the present.

Learning to praise the Lord is often difficult for new believers. These neophytes may find it challenging to tap into their own experiences with God. An effective strategy for assisting them would be to look at the events in the Bible and join in singing the Psalms. This method develops a lifestyle of praise, one that is not confined to the four walls of the sanctuary. When believers begin to sing and shout because of the deeds of God in the Bible, it becomes easier to sing and shout for the things God is doing in one's own life.

Likewise, the Red Sea experience, according to verse 7, serves as a warning to rebellious nations. "Come and see how God creates highways through waterways, but also how He judges the nations that 'rise' against Him" (paraphrase). The warning of verse 7 is clear: God is not blind to injustice. As Paul stated in Galatians

6:7–8, “Do not be deceived, God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.” In one sentence, Paul provided an explicit declaration: God’s sovereignty is eternal, and He warns people against attempting to revolt against Him.

The Three P’s (66:8–12)

These verses can be summarized in 3 P’s: Praise, Preserves, and Provides. Praise: The praise that is due to God is universal and diverse. The call is to all people because God is the God of all people (hence the pronoun “our”). Our God continues to provide an open invitation to join in a relationship that is not only available but offered to every person, which is extended regardless of nationality or socioeconomic background. How wonderful it will be to hear every language and dialect singing and shouting to the Lord simultaneously (Revelation 7:9–10).

Preserves: Although the Israelites were in Egyptian bondage for 430 years, the writer acknowledged that God preserves His people. “Preserving” is defined as refining. Refining silver is not a comfortable process. The process requires intense heat and pressure. Although the refining process is intense, each step is necessary to remove impurities and ultimately increase the silver’s value. Reading verses 10–12 quickly gives the impression that God imposed hardships on Israel, allowing their adversaries to oppress them. Yet, the ultimate goal, like the refining process, is to purify, strengthen, and reveal Israel’s actual value.

Provides: While we endure hardships and adversities in our lives, we may ask why or wonder if God has a reason or purpose for such adversities. Psalm 66:12 provides the answer. God wants to provide us a place of abundance, where we can sing and shout for the things God continues to do in our lives.

Fulfilling My Vows

Judges 11:30–39 warns about making rash vows. Vows that are made without thinking or without any intention of being kept almost always lead to unfortunate results. Often, when we are in trouble, we believe we can sway God by making false promises. Nowhere in the Bible do we see God bending His will because of our promises. How many times have we heard, “Lord, if you get me out of this, I will go to church every Sunday.” Yet in this psalm, the writer promised that if God delivered them, they would respond with sacrifices, singing, and shouting. In this case, it was not a rash vow, but a covenant agreement with God. Therefore, after God delivered them out of trouble, they were eager to pay their vow, verbally and tangibly, from their heart.

Will You Accept the Invitation? (66:13–20)

This section shifts the tone from invitation to acceptance, from “come and see” to “I will come.” There are several types of invitations. Some request your presence, and others request your participation. This section is an invitation to participate. Notice the

action verbs that are used: “I will sacrifice” and “I will offer.” The image is of someone excited to actively participate in the worship, out of personal appreciation for God because He delivered them from trouble. The appearance is that the writer, while experiencing trouble, made specific promises to God. “Lord, if you deliver me from this, I will do this and so.” Unfortunately, these promises are often unfulfilled. How many times have we made vows to the Lord that we will attend church every Sunday, only to renege once we are out of trouble? However, in this case, the writer is anxious and excited to fulfill their vows because God delivered them.

“If I Had Cherished Sin in My Heart”

Notice verse 18 is written in the past tense, as if pointing backward to a period in the writer’s life, possibly alluded to in verse 14. The writer said, “If at that moment, when I needed God to hear me, if I had held on to sin of any kind, my prayer would have been, not only unanswered but unheard” (paraphrased). Communities built adjacent to large highway projects often require a sound-deafening wall. The purpose of this wall is to diminish or prevent the noise of the freeway from penetrating the community. When we hold on to sin in our hearts, we are installing a prayer-deafening wall. That wall prevents God from hearing our prayer. Therefore, the first step in developing a healthy prayer life is confession and repentance.

Finally, verses 16–20 are a call to hear. “Hear me sing, and shout to the Lord because His deeds are wonderful” (paraphrase).

Developing a lifestyle of praise and worship is not easy, but it is a part of becoming a disciple. Discipleship begins by joining with individuals throughout the Bible to experience the miraculous deeds of God. Then, one begins to reflect on the deeds of God in one's life. Fully embracing this invitation of the Holy Spirit to sing and shout to the Lord for all the things He is doing through our lives, and the lives of others, is the goal of believers. In summary, the reason everyone should engage in singing and shouting is that, despite everything, God continues to hear our prayers and never withholds His love.

Implications and Actions

This lesson is a global invitation to sing and shout to the Lord. This call-to-action elevates one of the central events in human history: the Exodus, God's miraculous deliverance of His chosen people from bondage. However, the motivation for the calls to sing and shout are not only historical but also calls to celebrate what God is doing currently. Just as God's delivering Israel from bondage solicits shouting and singing, God delivering us from our troubles should be an occasion for rejoicing and thanksgiving. The question must be asked: are we engaging in singing and shouting, or are we passively dependent on others to celebrate in our stead? Every day, everyone should extend an invitation to others to sing and shout to the Lord.

Questions

1. When have been times in your life that your life choices prevented you from hearing God?

2. Can you think of a moment or time span in your life when God was refining you?

3. What tangible and audible ways do you sing and shout to the Lord?

4. What is the most significant barrier to your dedication to singing and shouting to the Lord consistently?

5. How can you use this psalm to guide your personal prayer and worship time with God?