

## Psalms

Psalm 131 – David simply and beautifully describes trusting the Lord like a child in its mother's lap, clinging to God's presence and finding consolation even in the midst of needful change, growth, and denial... Paul learned this too (Philippians 4:11).

Psalm 138 – echoing Joshua's declaration in Joshua 24:14-15, David chose to glorify the Lord God before all powers in heaven and on earth. As David bowed toward God's holy temple (remember there was no temple of the Lord in Jerusalem or anywhere on earth in David's lifetime) so also all kings of the earth will acknowledge God's word and glory (see Philippians 2:9-11).

God has chosen the lowly, not the high and mighty.

Notice v8. Many of God's people saw and acknowledged that God had a purpose for their lives, and if we will choose his word and his way, his purpose for us will be fulfilled (note Acts 13:36).

Psalm 139 – Since God has a purpose for my life (138:8), He has to know everything about me to fulfill it. So David affirms that the Lord knows all, inside out, everywhere and all the time. There is no where and no time in all creation, even in death, unknown to God. Each of us bears the fingerprints of God in the building of body and soul, from the beginning of life in our mother's womb.

Like many of David's psalms, along with praise and glory given to God there is an imprecation for divine justice, for ridding the world of the wicked and the violent.

Search me O God... he will whether we desire it or not, so know it and welcome God's scrutiny and the guidance he can give. These verses were the inspiration for a song, #420 in Song's of Faith and Praise.

Psalm 143 – when the enemy is in hot pursuit what do we do? David prayed and pleaded for mercy. He acknowledged his plight as a sinner. He meditated on God's works, both historical and personal. He longed for God like a thirsty man in a barren waste. Deliverance from enemies and following God's way went hand in hand, and the guidance of God's Spirit was key to following God's will, as it still is.

"I am your servant."

Psalm 144 – does the Lord our rock train our hands for war? Indeed, but it is not warfare against flesh and blood but against powers, and principalities and forces of evil, waged with weapons that are not of this world. V3 echoes Psalm 8:4, which is cited in Hebrews 2:6ff. V5-8 echo Psalm 18 (2 Samuel 22) with the dramatic deliverance David called for, and in this context, with the reference to man's nature in v3-4, we can appreciate that the great rescue and great battle when God came down was Jesus defeating Satan and overcoming all powers and authorities through the cross. The blessings called for in v12-18, becoming a permanent part of the garden/temple of the Lord's estate, are finally fulfilled in the New Jerusalem.

Psalm 145 – the greatness of God should be purposefully passed on from one generation to another. As in Deuteronomy 6:6-9 or 2 Timothy 2:2 the knowledge of God should be talked about and consciously passed along to the next generation of family and church.

God's providence is evident all around, and he responds to those who call upon him.

As the Psalms say again and again, all people should know and praise the Lord.

Psalm 127 – the psalm is attributed to Solomon, and we can read the “house” as a multifaceted term. A house can be a structure of wood, stone and other materials. Or a house can be a family, spanning generations. Or a house can be a dwelling for God. Living structures or structures occupied by the living will only stand if God is in the work, and cities (or nations) are only secure if God watches over them.

When Solomon wrote of children as a blessing and basis for strength in v3-5 he was certainly aware of failures in David’s family, and knew that his own family would be less than perfect. These blessings don’t require a perfect family to be true, from the beginning being enabled by God to “reproduce and multiply” has been a divine blessing. Children of any age should be cherished and appreciated, and brought before the Lord in prayer (remember the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the psalm).

Psalms 111-118 – none of the Psalms in this set have titles or authors’ names. Psalm 111, 112, and Psalm 119 are alphabetic acrostics that frame the group. In Psalms 111 and 112 successive half-line in Hebrew begins with the next letter in the alphabet, in Psalm 119 each successive 8 verses begins each line with the alphabet in series.

Psalm 111 begins with praise for the Lord, gives reasons he is praiseworthy, and like Proverbs enjoins the fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom, ending again with praise.

Psalm 112 is described as a twin of Psalm 111 in Hebrew. Not only the same number of verses and lines, but each half line beginning with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet and both psalms have the same number of syllables in the Hebrew language. Once again, “Praise the LORD!” There is an echo of Psalm 1, but also on theme with Psalm 111 which advocated the fear of the Lord in v10, the one who fears the Lord in 112:1 is blessed. The righteous are firm, steady, unmovable, again like Psalm 1; the wicked are none of those things, again, like Psalm 1.

Psalm 113 like the previous pair of Psalms opens with “Praise the LORD!” His heavenly domain is celebrated in 4-6, and his rescue of the needy in v7-9. The real raising up of the poor and barren is messianic in expectation, God does these things through the redemptive work of Christ.

Psalm 114 reminisces about God’s presence in Israel from Egypt onward. v3-4 bracket the 40 years in the wilds, with the crossings of the Red Sea and the Jordan River by divine power. v7-8 likewise celebrate the power of God over nature in the wilds when he brought water from the rock in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> years of Israel’s sojourn. The phrasing in v5-6 is surely intended to be humorous.

Psalm 115 celebrates the true God of wonders as opposed to the images men worship in lieu of the creator. Of note in v8, we tend to become like what we worship, what we admire. v16 echoes Genesis 1 in the creation account, and might offer some perspective in the 21<sup>st</sup> century when some humans aspire to leave the realm of our God given domain and colonize the heavens, which altogether belong to the Lord and were not given to man. Some folks had an aspiration along those lines but with different technology in Genesis 11.

While Psalm 115 has a comment that the dead do not praise the Lord in v17, Psalm 116 beautifully affirms that “precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints” in v15. God’s

attention for his people (as individuals) is celebrated. Attention for the childlike and debased. God helps his child, even through death. In turn, knowing that, we should rest in his presence and do all our duty as his holy ones in this world. v16 applies to many godly people throughout the generations, beneficiaries of godly mothers, and certainly to Jesus himself.

Psalm 117 has been sang in several variations in English as well as the ancient Hebrew. Again, the vision of all nations giving glory to God for his love and faithfulness occurs again and again in the Old Testament and comes to fruition in Jesus and the church.

Psalm 118 highlights again the steadfast love and faithfulness of God as praiseworthy. The priests are called out in v3 to join in the praise, along with all God's people in v4. We see v5-7 echoed in the New Testament in the teachings of Jesus and cited in Hebrews 13:6. Notice victory over the nations in the name of the Lord, v10-12. That name for us in Jesus. Notice the right hand of the Lord in v15-16. Jesus came as God's right hand (consider Isaiah 48:13, Matthew 26:64, Acts 2:25, 33, etc). We can say with the Psalmist that the Lord has not given us over to death (18). There is a gate (v19-20, Matthew 7:13) for the righteous into God's presence. The stone in v22-23 is Jesus (1 Peter 2:7). The one who came in the name of the LORD again is Jesus (v26, Matthew 21:9) and he was bound to the "horns of the altar" for our sake as our Passover lamb. Jesus is the ultimate expression of God's goodness, faithfulness, and steadfast love.

Psalm 37 is the "fret not yourself" psalm (v1, 7, 8). Don't be overly bothered when the wicked seem to prevail, it's temporary, there will be divine justice. As Jesus said in Matthew 5:5, "the meed will inherit the earth" (Psalm 37:11). There is a strong commendation of generosity and condemnation of selfishness in this psalm. The righteous may fall (v24) but they will still be upheld by the Lord. Contrast Judas who "fell headlong" in Acts 1:18). v25 fits the scenario of the recent readings in Chronicles and 1 Kings, David's observations as an old man. Numerous phrases in the psalm are eye catching assurances, like proverbs, including v8, 16, 27, 37, 39

Psalm 71 also speaks of "old age" in v9 and 17, a time of vulnerability, except that God watches over his child. The life of the righteous isn't trouble free (v20) but the LORD revives again (and again).

Psalm 94 extolls God's character as judge. He who created the senses and intellect (v8-11) sees, hears, and knows all that is done by everyone, and he will deal with everyone, all the nations, justly. He is God of vengeance (v1) and that's honorable, admirable, and praiseworthy. Unjust people, rulers (v20) and nations will be held to account, because God is the stronghold of his people.

Psalm 72, the last psalm of Book 2, is attributed to Solomon, and follows the same thoughts as his request for wisdom to govern early in his reign. Reading the psalm we do see the earnest young king seeking God's help to govern a robust and growing kingdom, but we also see idealized expectations that only the future "royal son," Jesus, will fulfill. Expectations of who the Christ would be and what he would do included v4, 7, 8, 12-13, 17. The New Testament tells us that Jesus did these things, is this kind of ruler, has this kind of dominion, that his name is glorious forever and the whole earth is filled with his glory.

## Psalm 136

YaHWeH, the LORD, is God of gods and Lord of lords (see 1 Corinthians 8:5-6, 10:20:21; Ephesians 1:20-21, Colossians 1:16; Romans 8:38-39; Ephesians 6:12).

The repeated chorus in this psalm, “for his steadfast love endures forever,” was in the songs of the Levites when the Ark came into the temple, 2 Chronicles 5:13.

Evoking memories of God’s wonders in creation, and for his people in the Exodus and wilderness through to the beginnings of the conquest, and finally his everyday providence in the creation, are reminders for every generation of God’s faithfulness to his people.

The LORD, YaHWeH, is good, is God of gods and Lord of lords, he is the God of heaven, and he is personified in Revelation 19:11-18 as the Faithful and True Word of God who is King of kings and Lord of lords.

Psalm 134 is the last of 15 psalms (120-134) with the title “a song of ascents.” These psalms seem to have been used, at least in the 2<sup>nd</sup> temple years, when worshipers (from afar) approached and departed from the temple area. This psalm celebrates the Levites who stood watch and served in the temple during the night. Remember that the words for the service of the Levites (Numbers 3:7-8) are the same words that described the responsibilities of man in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:15).

Psalms 146-150 – “Hallelujah” (“Praise the LORD”) in 146:1 and 150:6 are the first and last words of this final set of 5 Psalms. These 5 psalms share themes of praise, exalting the King of the cosmos, the Creator of all things, the Revealer of truth and Keeper of not only the cosmic whole, but the weak and needy within the creation who appeal to him for help.

Psalm 146, “put not your trust in princes,” not even the rulers of Judah or Israel, or America, but rather in the maker of heaven and earth who is utterly faithful and attentive to the needy and oppressed.

Psalm 147, God builds up his city, gathers his people and cares for them, and meanwhile tends the entire universe with personal knowledge and attention of every distant star. His knowledge and power exceed comprehension, and his attention is upon the humble, as he continues to manage all the affairs of the natural world. Note where God’s pleasure in the creation is found, v10-11. Within the infinite range of God’s attention and activity, he has made himself known in understandable words, uniquely delivered to and through the people he chose (v19-20).

Psalm 148, v1-6 calls upon the heavenly host, including the great lights and including the ranks of angels, to praise the LORD who created them and set them in order. Then v7-14 calls upon everything on earth likewise to praise the LORD who made them all, including every sort of human being.

Psalm 149, again exhorting God’s people to praise the LORD (hallelujah) in song, in a new song; and we have again God’s pleasure in his people who exult in him day and night, in good times

and hard. The triumph of God's humbled people is graphically celebrated in victory over the oppressors and persecutors of the godly, brought into subjection to God's glory and his people's honor.

Psalm 150 is the finale of the psalter, and the injunction to praise the LORD in his sanctuary, which is connected with the heavens. When God is glorified among his people that glory extends to the might heavens where God dwells. The earthly temple (the church) is bound together with the heavenly host in giving God glory with gusto, with exuberant celebration. Praise the LORD! Hallelujah!

#### Psalm 82-83

Psalm 82 pictures God as head, king, over a celestial court, as seen also in various other prophetic visions and psalms (recall Psalm 89:5-7). God, over the gods (created celestial beings, the sons of God elsewhere, as in Job 1), holds them accountable for (not) pursuing justice and mercy among the nations. Various scriptures allude to God judging the heavenly beings who abandoned their responsibilities (see Job 15:15-16, 4:18:19; 1 Corinthians 6:3, 2 Peter 2:4, for example). There is a death to which both sinful humans and unfaithful angels are alike doomed, the lake of fire. ... Jesus cited v6 in John 10:34 when he was accused of blasphemy for claiming his divine heritage as one who came from heaven and did the works of God.

Psalm 83 is an imprecatory psalm appealing to God for judgment upon the nations that gather against Israel. Some of the nations listed here, Edom, Moab, and Ammon, were primary invaders in the assault defeated by praise in Jehoshaphat's days, 2 Chronicles 20:1-2, 10, 22. Notice in the psalmist's plea for judgment against the violent nations he also utters the prophetic purpose in v16, "that they may seek your name, O LORD," and in v18 "that they may know that you alone... are the Most High over all the earth." Divine judgment in this world has more than one purpose, and provoking repentance is one of them.

Psalm 48 is attributed to the sons of Korah, with no particular date. It is one of a series of Psalms celebrating the Great King of all the earth and his dominion and habitation.

The LORD in Psalm 48 is "our God" (1, 8, 14) and Zion/Jerusalem is His city. This Jerusalem though is described in hyperbolic terms that exceed the geographic location. It is on God's holy mountain, it is the joy of all the earth. The reference to the north in v2 is the Hebrew term Zaphon which is the name of a high mountain in Lebanon, north of Israel. Zaphon was considered by the Phoenicians to be the dwelling place of the god El, high God of the Canaanite pantheon. But the psalmist asserts that Zion is that exalted dwelling of God, the great King. Her strength is not her walls or troops, but the presence of God himself. Kings and nations gathered against Zion tremble in failure. Though geographic Zion is nowhere near the sea, a mention of the east wind destroying the ships of distant nations is included in the defense of Zion. This again is more than the city built by man. As the whole earth, the ends of the earth, are filled with God's praise connected with this Zion, so are the 4 directions poetically included. We have the north, Zaphon, in v2, and the east (wind) in v7. Then we have the south in v10 where the Hebrew euphemism that means "south" is "right hand" and west is obliquely mentioned in v13, a word translated "next" in the ESV that literally means "behind" in Hebrew, and would mean west in

geographic terms for Israel, west being “behind” you when you face the sunrise (east). This city of Zion, at the center of the Psalm, v8, is the eternal city of God.

## Psalm 76

My note on Psalm 76 is “2 Chronicles 32” which corresponds to 2 Kings 19:35–37 and Isaiah 37:36-38. The psalm celebrates the deliverance of Jerusalem (Salem in v2) from the power of the warriors who came up against her, reasonably the Assyrian army in 701 BC. As God was to be feared that day (v7) he is to be feared still, he is still capable of arising to establish judgment and save the humble of the earth, and no nation or ruler can prevail against him. Rather, their greatest rebellions will only prove his glory.

## Psalms 46, 80, 135

Psalm 46 celebrates God’s protection of his people, a fortress and a help in times of trouble. Not that there will be no trouble, but that God helps when troubles come, even enormous difficulties. Note that the river in v4 takes us out of geographical Jerusalem, the city of God here is much more than the physical city which has no river. This is the enduring city of God of which Jerusalem was a shadow. The mighty works of God in v8-10 include the institution of peace in v9, a definitive aspect of the kingdom Isaiah prophesied for the Christ, and that Jesus promised to his disciples.

Psalm 80 – who is the shepherd of Israel? “Enthroned above the cherubim” reminds us of the Ark of the Covenant, which was a shadow of the divine throne, language Hezekiah also used in his prayer for deliverance from Assyria. Since Jesus presents himself as the good shepherd, and we know he is enthroned at the right hand of God, and he is the light that came into the world, we can associate the psalmist’s message not just with ancient trials that inspired it, the ravages of Israel and Judah by Assyria and Babylon and others, but the Lord’s working in our own lives. v17 refers to the one God has enthroned, the one who sits on the throne of David in the strength of the LORD. v19 is a plea for help we can echo in our distress.

Psalm 135 – who are these servants of the LORD who stand in his house and praise him? The Levites filled that role in their day, and Christians now stand and serve in the house of the LORD, to praise and sing. As affirmed repeatedly in Isaiah 40-66, the LORD Jehovah is unique among those who are worshiped, whether the idols men make or the demons associated with idolatry, our Lord is above them all, as certainly echoed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 8-10. His direct involvement in his creation day by day (v6-7) has not diminished. His past works for the sake of his people (v8-12) indicate what he can and will do, as he pleases, unrestrained by man’s power or desires. v15-18 parallel descriptions of idols in Isaiah 41-48. The admonition to bless the LORD in v19-21 includes Israel with her priests and Levites, but also broadly includes people like ourselves, “you who fear the LORD.”

Psalms 73-83, most of Book 3 (Psalms 73-89), are attributed to Asaph. Since some of these psalms (ie 74 and 79) are from the time of the Babylonian captivity when Jerusalem and the temple were in ruins, the ascription to Asaph suggests the Levitical family branch of singers who were the descendants of Asaph. The original Asaph lived in the days of David and Solomon.

#### Psalm 74

The singer in Psalm 74 was seeking deliverance for God's people in exile, and a restoration of Jerusalem and the temple that had been destroyed (v2-3). The temple and "meeting places" (v8) had been burned. Neither miracles nor prophets were in evidence. In fact, the last word from Jeremiah and Baruch is around 560 BC, and Ezekiel's last recorded message was in 573 BC. Daniel was still in the royal service, but there's no indication of active prophets among the people in exile until Haggai and Zechariah in 520 BC. A generation apparently passed without signs or prophetic guidance.

Nevertheless, the destruction of Egypt, illustrated as a multi-headed sea monster (v12-14, and see Ezekiel 29:5), was still a reminder of God's power to deliver his people from bondage and keep order among the nations. The psalmist appealed to God to once again help the poor and needy, and put the scoffers in their place.

#### Psalm 79

A psalm of Asaph (see comment on Psalms 73-83)

The psalmist saw foreigners occupying the place God had given to Israel, the divine inheritance. As predicted by the prophets, the people of Judah and Jerusalem had died and been abandoned without burial. Divine anger (v5) had been directed against Israel, and the psalmist appealed for that anger to be redirected against the ungodly nations (v6), which also the prophets had predicted, in due time. The psalmist expressed contrition for past sins, and the desire for the shepherd to rise up and care for the sheep. Ultimately, while God did bring a remnant back to the land, the deliverance the psalmist longed for would await the Good Shepherd who brought real salvation to those who fear the LORD.

#### Psalm 137

"By the waters of Babylon"

The Psalm seems to be set in the days shortly after the destruction of Jerusalem (586 BC) and mentions the same failings of Edom in those days that Obadiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel all highlight as contemptible. As in the last words of Jeremiah, the then future conquest of Babylon by Cyrus was anticipated. The psalmist knew the words of the prophets of that generation, and echoed them in this imprecatory prayer for judgement against the heartless oppressors of the exiled Jews. The greatest longing of the exiles was Jerusalem, even as Christians long for the city of God.