

An Analysis of Psalms

Commentary for April 1, 2008 — Music and Words for the Ages

The Book of Psalms is the subject of this month's article compiled from four lectures by Dr. Ernest Martin from 1997 and 1998. At that time he gave four lectures on Psalms with excellent material that every Bible student should know. The information presented adds to his excellent and concise "[Appendix 1: Preliminary Suggestions for the Structure of Psalms](#)" from his book *Restoring the Original Bible*. If you have not read that appendix, or if you read it a long time ago, I recommend you read it before you study this month's article.

Psalms are Hebrew songs and poetry set to music. The Psalms as we have them today in the Hebrew canon were written and developed over a long period of time. One psalm is from the time of Moses which was put into the Book of Psalms. Most of the psalms date from the time of King David of Israel who wrote over half of all the Psalms himself. Some of David's associates such as "**the sons of Korah**" and Asaph wrote several psalms.¹ Solomon probably wrote at least two of the Psalms (Psalms 72 and 127). More were added later at the time of King Hezekiah of Judah and Jeremiah added psalms before the exile to Babylon.

After the exile, Ezra the priest compiled and arranged all the present psalms together into the five divisions of 150 psalms. That collection tells a story. Dr. Martin's article gives you a perspective on that story that you probably were not familiar with, or had forgotten. Most Bible commentaries will tell you the outline of the five divisions of the Psalms, but few will give you what those divisions communicate to the reader, or in the time of Christ and the apostles, what the listeners of the psalm performances learned by "hearing" the Psalms given in proper sequence. The Psalms tell a story using the Temple and Holy Days of Israel as a framework. It is a fascinating study.

Mankind's most profound thoughts about God are found in the Book of Psalms, as well as the full range of human emotions that each of us have felt about life, about love, about our relationships with other people, and about our relationship to God. Some psalms are prayers, several praise God, yet others are pleas to God for rescue for individuals or nations. Some are confessions of sin. Some psalms ask for forgiveness while others call for God's judgment. Some praise the Law of God, while others talk of wisdom and why evil prospers and good often suffers. The full range of human emotions and situations of life are contained in the Psalms.²

The main subject of the Psalms is God as creator, details about God, God's covenant with Israel, representing man, as the object. The Psalms also reveal a great deal of information about Christ and His mission on earth. Many psalms tell of situations of the author such as King David, but those same Psalms in a greater reality describe Christ's acts during His ministry, crucifixion, resurrection, and even His enthronement as King.

When Christ met the two disciples on the road to Emmaus He explained to them His work and ministry on earth from the Scripture before they realized who He was:

"And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself."

• Luke 24:27

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1. The sons of Korah wrote (or assisted in writing or arranged the music for) Psalms 42, 44–48 while 12 psalms are attributed to Asaph.
 2. See "Psalms" in *The New Bible Dictionary*, J.D. Douglas, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1962).

Later He showed Himself to the disciples and the remaining 11 apostles (Judas was dead by this time):

“And he said unto them, These are the words which I spoke unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding [minds], that they might understand the scriptures.”

• *Luke 24:44-45*

They did not comprehend the Scriptures that pertained to Him and His purpose until He opened their minds to understand. Remember also, they had been with Him for His entire ministry. They heard His teaching of the parables to the multitudes and had private explanations with Him about the meanings, yet they still did not understand the Scriptures about Him until their minds were opened to understand. Many of the Psalms concerned Him.

So we should not feel bad about not being able to comprehend how the prophecies of the Old Testament apply to Christ. Before His resurrection the apostles could not understand either. Reading the Psalms in detail, with comprehension, asking God to open our minds, will give us the confidence to see Christ's fulfillment of the prophecies in the Psalms. Just as the Psalms give us a wealth of detail about King David's thoughts and emotions, about significant events in his life for the psalms he wrote as a prophet (Acts 2: 29–30), the psalms of David, and most of the other psalms as well, all tell some aspects of God's plan and Christ's life, death, or glory. Some psalms even tell about events Christ experienced before He was born of Mary.

Not only are the Psalms a tremendous resource for details about David and Christ, they also tell us about ourselves. Many psalms deal with everyday issues and problems we all face. Learning what God can teach us from the Psalms provides solace to troubled minds. The words in the Psalms are so powerful that even filtered through translation, they still have profound effects on our emotions and minds. The message of the Psalms is best learned by understanding the proper context of every passage, verse, and psalm in relation to all others.

Dr. Martin mentioned on the 1997 tape that he hoped to write a book someday to give the full liturgical context and details necessary to truly understand what the Psalms fully teach. They would be details about Christ and the prophecies that were fulfilled, incorporating the correct understanding the psalm titles and authorship designations, relating the prophecies in Psalms with other Bible prophecies so that interrelationships (with occasional double or triple fulfillments) are obvious to anyone. However, God had other avenues of research and writing for Dr. Martin to pursue. Such a task of relating the Psalm prophecies with the other prophecies in the Bible must be done by someone else —perhaps you will do it.

One of Dr. Martin's great skills was his ability to recognize relationships that interweave naturally between and among biblical texts. These relationships mutually inform each other **“here a little, there a little”** (Isaiah 28:9–13). This is a principle that permeates all of Holy Scripture. No thought expressed in God's word exists in isolation. Each forms a type of “cell” that interacts with other cells to form a body of the Word of God. Like the human body or the body of Christ (the *ekklesia*), God's Word is made up of constituent parts, each unique and yet related and linked to many other parts.

Yet as a literary body the Book of Psalms is a coherent whole, with its unified purpose, symmetry, and internal consistency. The Book of Psalms is a truly remarkable compilation that consistently rewards study and reading and listening.³

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3. Most libraries have audio Bibles with Psalms to check out. The first two links on the ASK [“Web Links, Electronic Bible Resources”](#) are for audio Bibles, listening while you study God's Word.