

Contents

1	How to Read the Psalms — <i>December 30–January 5</i> —————	4
2	Teach Us to Pray — <i>January 6–12</i> —————	12
3	The Lord Reigns — <i>January 13–19</i> —————	20
4	The Lord Hears and Delivers — <i>January 20–26</i> —————	28
5	Singing the Lord’s Song in a Strange Land — <i>January 27–February 2</i> —————	36
6	I Will Arise — <i>February 3–9</i> —————	44
7	Your Mercy Reaches Unto the Heavens — <i>February 10–16</i> —————	52
8	Wisdom for Righteous Living — <i>February 17–23</i> —————	60
9	Blessed Is He Who Comes in the Name of the Lord — <i>February 24–March 1</i> —————	68
10	Lessons of the Past — <i>March 2–8</i> —————	76
11	Longing for God in Zion — <i>March 9–15</i> —————	84
12	Worship That Never Ends — <i>March 16–22</i> —————	92
13	Wait on the Lord — <i>March 23–29</i> —————	100

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The Psalms: Where God and People Meet Heart to Heart



The Psalms are prayers and hymns of the Bible par excellence. Uttered in praise, joy, sorrow, and despair; spoken or sung in private and in the public by laypeople, kings, poets, and priests; coming from both the righteous and repentant sinners, the Psalms have served as the prayer book and the hymnbook to generations of believers.

The book of Psalms owes its distinct role to the fact that while most of the Bible speaks *to* us, the Psalms speak *for us* and *with us*. The Psalms are a source of blessing, hope, and revival, a guide for both self-reflection and reflection on God's greatness, liberating when one cries out of the depths, and captivating for a renewed surrender to God. It is thus not surprising that many people find the Psalms resonating with their emotions and experiences and adopt them as their own prayers. Luther poignantly speaks of the Psalms: "Where can one find nobler words to express joy than in the Psalms of praise or gratitude? In them you can see into the hearts of all the saints as if you were looking at a lovely pleasure-garden, or were gazing into heaven. . . . Or where can one find more profound, more penitent, more sorrowful words in which to express grief than in the Psalms of lamentation? In these, you see into the hearts of all the saints as if you were looking at death or gazing into hell, so dark and obscure is the scene rendered by the changing shadows of the wrath of God. . . . It is therefore easy to understand why the Book of Psalms is the favourite book of all the saints. For every man on every occasion can find in it Psalms which fit his needs, which he feels

to be as appropriate as if they had been set there just for his sake. In no other book can he find words to equal them, nor better words.”— Martin Luther, *Martin Luther: Selections From His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor Books, 1962), pp. 39, 40.

To experience the life-transforming power of the Psalms, we are called to sing and pray them as did the generations of believers who have used the Psalms to pour out their praises, petitions, confessions, laments, and thanksgiving to the sovereign God of grace and justice.

Do we need to *study* the Psalms, then? Like the rest of the Scriptures, the Psalms were written in their distinctive historical, theological, and literary contexts. The task of the study of the Psalms is to bring the particular world of the Psalms closer to the modern audience. We must note that while the Psalms are prayers of God’s people and even prayers that Jesus prayed as the incarnated Lord, the Psalms are also prayers *about* Jesus. They are God’s revelation to humanity. Another task of the study of the Psalms is, thus, to learn from the Psalms about all that God did, does, and will do for the world in and through Jesus Christ.

Although the Psalms are a collection of 150 poems, the collection may not be as random as it appears. The Psalms bear witness to a spiritual journey that is common to many of God’s children. The journey begins with a faith that is firmly established and secured by God’s sovereign rule and where good gets rewarded and evil punished. As we progress through our study, we will see what happens when the well-ordered world of faith is challenged and threatened by evil. Does God still reign? How can believers sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?

Our desire and prayer are that the Psalms strengthen us on our life journey, and through them we get to meet God daily, heart to heart, until the day when we see Jesus Christ face to face.

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