

Insights from the Psalms
People of the Word Lecture 2 - 2021
by Dellen Ludwig

"The book of Psalms contains ancient Israel's favorite hymns and prayers, which were used in their worship of the Lord, the Great King." [Zondervan Study Bible; Introduction to Psalms]

It is a collection of song lyrics and prayers written by Moses, David, Solomon and various gifted Biblical song writers from Israel's history. These songs and prayers were written in the years spanning from about 1440 BC in the time of Moses, until the era of post exile Israel about 538 BC.

Let's consider how these songs influenced the lives of the men, women and children in Israel who heard them. Some of the Psalms were songs of joy, sung to the Lord God in worship of all He is and does. Some were much more like prayers, written in times of deep distress, pouring out worries and fears to the Lord and searching for relief. Some were songs of pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem which were sung as they began the ascent up Mount Zion to attend the feasts at the Temple together. Some were acrostic using the Hebrew alphabet to help in instruction of Biblical principles.

I remember when my daughter was in AWANAs, and we were helping her memorize a number of Bible verses each week. We would sometimes put the verses to a simple tune so that she could more easily remember them. Our own hymn books have songs that quote and expand on God's Word to help us understand His amazing love for us. That is what the Psalms did. The parents would sing the songs over and over so that soon the children could sing along with them, memorizing these ancient words of praise and prayer.

Ancient copies even made note of the instruments with which the songs should be played. Although the tunes may be lost today, the words of the Psalms have been crafted so that they still touch our hearts in ways nothing else can.

From the time of Moses, the Bible recorded the names of the men who were gifted in carving, construction and singing. Each held an important part in Israel's worship. They were gifted by the Lord and recognized that their inspiration came from Him. Among these talented writers, we may be most familiar with David and his well-known song, Psalm 23. But we may not have noticed, before this week's lesson, how often prophecy is found in the book of Psalms.

Look at the last verse of Psalm 23: "Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." [Psalm 23:6] As a shepherd out in the fields around his father Jesse's house, David had no idea of the life God had in store for him in the future: Anointed as a future king, singing for

king Saul, fighting Goliath, leading an army, fleeing Saul's wrath, living in the wild, playing the part of a crazy man, choosing unhappy and happy marriages and building a kingship that was filled with battles and intrigue.

Yet he wrote many songs of God's protection and presence that are remembered and loved today. His inspiration of trust in God's goodness and love helped David through the most difficult days of his life. But he was also inspired to reveal that God had a place for him, in the Lord's own house, in which David knew he would "dwell forever." Those words were a touch of prophecy. And because David recorded the 23rd Psalm, millions have also found that same confidence and comfort that loved ones would dwell in the house of the Lord forever after their lives on earth were complete.

There are prophetic references throughout the Psalms. I would encourage you to take note of them as you read the Psalms in the future. But today/tonight, in our lesson, we will concentrate on the Messianic prophecies in Psalms, beginning with 1) The Future Davidic Covenant; 2) The Finished Work of Christ; and 3) The Final Reign as Priest and King.

The Future Davidic Covenant

Psalm 89:3,4 spoke of the covenant God made with David. "You said, 'I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant, I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations.'" This Psalm refers to the promise God made to David through the prophet Nathan, as recorded in 2 Samuel 7:16: "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever."

God chose David, whom He called, "A man after my own heart" [1 Samuel 13:14] to be king after Saul's reign. David consolidated Israel as a nation by war, and his son, Solomon, established the kingdom at its height through treaties. God promised that a descendant of David would be King forever and rule all of the nations forever. That "forever" descendant was called Messiah in Hebrew, or in Greek: the Christ.

Psalm 110 spoke of the reign of Messiah. In verse 2 it is said that He will rule from Zion. That is the mountain's name where the temple was built. Verses 5-7 reveal that His reign will "crush kings...judge the nations...and (crush) the rulers of the whole earth." However, verse 4 described Him as "a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."

One of the properties of the prophecies in Psalms is that they speak first concerning the current subject, in this case about King David; then second, they refer to a future fulfillment. David was a King of Israel; therefore, many of the references in

his Psalms do refer to his life. In fact, Psalm 110 was used for the coronation ceremony of his son Solomon and future kings who were descendants of David.

However, New Testament authors used Psalm 110 to recognize Jesus was the Christ it discussed. In Matthew 22:43 Jesus used verse 1 to explain that He, as Messiah, was the "Lord" David referred to. The author of Hebrews used verse 4 to explain how Jesus Christ was both the King and Priest of His Kingdom, after the order of Melchizedek. [Hebrews 5] Melchizedek, we remember, was a priest/king in Salem during Abraham's life. He led Abraham in sacrifices and giving tithes in thanks to God, after winning a battle that saved his nephew Lot from enslavement.

Although God established the priesthood of Israel at Mt. Sinai during the time of the exodus as descending from Aaron, Melchizedek was not a descendent of Aaron, but pre-dated him to the time of Abraham. Therefore, the author of Hebrews declared that the priesthood of Christ was superior to that of the priests in Jesus' day, because it existed prior to their priesthood being instituted. Messiah would be "a priest forever" (verse 4), contrary to the Aaronic priests who only served during their lifetime.

As king, David ruled Israel and also led in worship of the Lord serving as a type of priest/king during his lifetime. But his king/priest position was not the case for all of his descendants. Only a few followed his example of dedication to the Lord. Many recorded kings of Israel fell into idolatry and disobedience to God. Since their expulsion by Rome in 70 A.D., there has not been a king over Israel at all.

But God promised in His covenant that David's descendants would reign forever. This reign was stated as crushing the rulers of other nations and judging the nations as well. [Psalm 110:5,6] Near-term, David did lead his armies to crush idol worshiping nations around them; and he totally abolished them as God commanded, not letting those kings continue to rule their kingdoms under His supremacy. Prophetically, however, this part of Psalm 110 is also about a "future son of David," - the Messiah's reign.

We'll consider more Psalms that reveal Christ's future reign after we first discuss how Messiah would come to save the world, by dying on the cross.

The Finished Work of Christ

We have seen that Messiah would be a Son of David, and continue to reign forever. Each king who followed in David's line gave hope to the nation that they might be this promised One. But in a time of sorrow, David also wrote Psalm 22. In it he revealed his distress, and yet his hope, that the Lord would deliver him. It was not until the crucifixion of Jesus, over 500 years later, that the prophecy of this Psalm was revealed.

Matthew chapter 27, Mark chapter 15, Luke chapter 23 and John chapter 19 all record eye witness accounts of Jesus' crucifixion; they form an eerie parallel to this Psalm written over 500 years before.

Psalm 22:1 "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Matthew 27:46 "About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' - which means 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'"

Psalm 22:7,8 "All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. 'He trusts in the Lord.' they say. 'let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him since he delights in him.'"

Mark 15:31,32 "In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. 'He saved others,' they said, 'but he can't save himself. Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.' Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him."

Psalm 22:15 "My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; ..."

John 19:28,29 "Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I am thirsty.' A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips."

Psalm 22:18 "They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment."

Luke 23:34 "Jesus said, 'Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.' And they divided up his clothes by casting lots."

Another nugget of prophecy that is recorded in Psalm16:10 prophesied His resurrection from the dead: "because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay." Luke 24:5-6 recorded the words the angels said to the women who went to Jesus' tomb to put spices on his body. "In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!'"

Jesus met with His disciples forty times after His resurrection to explain what had happened, and what their mission would be. As our memory verse stated, he told them "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." The disciples then preached about the resurrected Savior to fellow Jews and later to groups of Gentiles, using prophecies from the Old Testament, including the Psalms to connect Jesus' life to their fulfillment.

Jesus used Psalms 118:22-23 to explain the choice people needed to make concerning His ministry. Psalm 118 described Messiah as a cornerstone. A cornerstone

was a huge foundational stone positioned precisely in the foundation of a building so that all of the rest of the stones in a building would be placed in orientation to it. The cornerstone was critical so that the building would squarely meet the proportions that it was designed to fulfill.

Jesus told religious rulers who questioned His authority, "...Have you never read in Scriptures: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.' Therefore, I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed." [Matthew 21:42-43]

Peter brought this same illustration before the Sanhedrin when he later was arrested by them for healing in Jesus' name. In Acts 4 verses 11-12, he challenged them saying, "Jesus is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.' Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

This decision about accepting or rejecting Jesus, "the Cornerstone," is the primary decision we need to deal with today. Just as the Jews found out, Jesus Christ came to offer redemption to all people. Romans 3:23 states: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." We all find our lives are not "squared-up" in comparison to God's holiness. But God came to earth as He promised, as the Son of David, the Son of God, to make a way for us to enjoy Him forever.

Romans 5:8 tells us, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 6:23 states, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." So, every person on the earth, in any age, must decide to either put their faith in Jesus as our Messiah/Christ, or reject Him and be crushed by the fact of their own rejection, preferring the wages of sin.

If you have never made this choice about Jesus in your life, we as your leaders would encourage you to do so today. Talk to your discussion leader or simply talk to Christ in prayer. Accepting Him as your Savior is just the first step in an exciting life He has prepared for you.

Beginning with Jesus' death and resurrection, believers in Jesus have built their lives on Him as our foundation. He has finished His work of redemption. When we put our trust in this finished work, our lives are then dedicated to being the building, the "temple" built on that cornerstone, whose purpose is to bring others to worship Him. He is our foundation, our structure and our hope for the future.

But those who reject Him will be judged, or “crushed” as Jesus promised in Matthew 21. Although our lives are now dedicated to sharing this salvation Jesus offered us, those who reject His offered redemption will realize that the future of Christ's Kingdom is far from over. The Psalms also prophesied things that are still future to us yet, that will affect the whole world to come.

The Final Reign as King and Priest

Psalm 2 presents a picture of the reign of Messiah over all the earth, in our future. It begins by saying, “Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, 'Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles.'” [Psalm 2:1-3]

Throughout the history of mankind, people have wanted a perfect life, with peace and prosperity, but on our own we don't really know what a perfect life is. Nations have conspired to force their brand of utopia on the rest of the world and continue to do so today. But the problem is that sinful people could never wield complete power over the world without their selfish ambitions interjecting a bias towards themselves.

Prophecy, however, reveals that someday God will institute the perfect kingdom to rule all of earth. Psalms 2:4-6 declared: “The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. He rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, 'I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain.'” Furthermore, in verse 9 it is said, “You will break them with a rod of iron, you will dash them to pieces like pottery.”

The Lord Messiah will one day end the tribulations caused by our sinfulness and rule all the nations of the earth. Other prophecies we will study will further describe this reign as being 1000 years or a millennium. Christ will come when all the nations are raging against His saints and will defeat their attack against Israel. He will establish His reign with “a rod of iron” and end the efforts of evil men to forcefully take over the world.

Further benefits of this kingdom are described in Psalm 72:11-14, “May all kings bow down to him and all nations serve him. For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight.”

Many references throughout the Psalms proclaim that only God can bring justice against evil men and peace, prosperity and redemption to people who love Him. Psalm

96:11 said, "Let all the earth rejoice before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness." Psalm 98:8-9 describes that all creation will rejoice because of Christ's reign. "Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy; let them sing before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity." Psalm 9 verses 7,8 repeat this prophecy: "The Lord reigns forever; he has established his throne for judgment. He rules the world in righteousness and judges the peoples with equity." But justice is a two-edged sword, as Psalm 9 goes on to reveal in verses 16 and 17: "The Lord is known by his acts of justice; the wicked are ensnared by the work of their hands. The wicked go down to the realm of the dead, all the nations that forget God."

Earlier I referred to the writer of Hebrews who spoke about Melchizedek as a type of Christ, a "priest forever." That phrase is of greater importance than we might at first recognize. There was no record of the birth or death of Melchizedek in Scripture; therefore, God used him as a type of Christ. Christ had no beginning and will have no end. His reign will be forever. It will not end just because people rebel against Him and it cannot be destroyed by Satan. It will even outlast the heavens and earth.

As our "priest forever," Hebrews reminds us of several things about Jesus: Hebrews 7:22 He has become the guarantor of a better covenant. His covenant works daily in our lives, because "he always lives to intercede for them." [Hebrews 7:25] His priestly duties included meeting daily our need for grace and the help to live for Him and learn to imitate Him in our lives.

Since the penalty for our sin was paid on the cross "once for all," [Hebrews 7:27] even though we continue to sin, His intercession continues to provide cleansing for that sin and no further sacrifice is needed. Because Jesus as our High Priest completed the requirements of the Law through His perfect sacrifice, we can live forever as He reigns as our King for eternity.

The book of Revelation will bring clarity to many of the prophecies from the Old Testament. If we take a quick peek at Revelation 21, we can see how these prophecies from Psalms help our understanding. In that chapter John wrote: "Then I saw 'a new heaven and a new earth,' for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'" [Rev. 21:1-4]

All of this takes place after the final judgment. Psalm 102:25-26 says, "the heavens are the work of your hands. They will all perish, but you remain;" Jesus Christ reigns forever: after Satan has made his last stand, after this broken down earth we call home comes to an end, Christ will still be on the throne. Way back in David's life, he wrote in Psalm 102 that the rule of Christ would last longer than His creation!

Let me close with this thought: Psalm 56:23 established God's justice over evil in the end. "But you, God, will bring down the wicked into the pit of decay; the bloodthirsty and deceitful will not live out half their days. But as for me, I trust in you."

People put their trust in many things. The rich trust that their money will provide everything they need or want; the powerful trust that their might or influence will keep them in power; the deceitful trust that their words and faulty logic will talk them out of any adversity; the wise trust that others will always follow their directions. But the Psalms reveal that none of these objects of trust will last forever.

On the contrary, those who have put their trust in the Lord have chosen that which will last forever; longer than the heavens and earth. We referred in our lesson to Psalm 102:25-26, "In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will all perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded." Then, like the Psalm writer David said, we will understand, "Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." [Psalm 23:6]