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Reading: Psalm 117 - Psalm 118:8

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

20. THE BOOK OF PSALMS

Throughout history, when the hearts of God's people have been right before Him there has been singing and music. Do you recall when God brought His people out of captivity in *Egypt* and delivered them from Pharaoh's pursuing army, that they sang a song to the Lord.

(Ex 15:1) When God gave *Israel* victory over Jabin, the king of Canaan, under the leadership of Deborah and Barak, they sang (Judges 5:1) When David brought up the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem, there was much joy expressed through singing and music (1 Chron. 15:25-28) When King Hezekiah restored the temple worship in Jerusalem, the Levites sang praises to the Lord.

(2 Chron. 29:30) At the conclusion of the Lord's Supper, just before Christ and the disciples went out to the Mount of Olives where He would be betrayed and arrested, they sang a hymn (Mk 14:26), which commentators agree was the Hallel. (Psalms 113-118)

When Paul and Silas were unjustly thrown into jail in Philippi, with their backs beaten and their feet in the stocks, they sang hymns of praise to God (Acts 16:25) Since the days of the New Testament, God's people have continued to sing. In A.D. 112, Pliny wrote a letter to the Emperor Trajan which reported, among other things, that

the Christians sang hymns " *to Christ as God.*" In 1415, the Bohemian Reformer Jan Hus sang praises to God as he was burned at the stake. A psalm was the expression of joy uttered by Augustine at his conversion, and a psalm was the consolation on his lips as he lay on his deathbed. John Chrysostom comforted himself in exile by quoting the Psalms. John Hus had a psalm on his lips as he was burned at the stake. Reciting a psalm, Luther entered the Diet of Worms prepared to defy the church and stand by faith alone.

The great revivals under the Wesley's in the 18th century and Moody and Sankey in the 19th century were also marked by an upsurge in hymn-writing and singing. And one day in heaven, we will all be gathered around the throne of God, singing praises to the Lamb that was slain (Rev. 5:9 14:3 15:3) You see, whenever God's people have their hearts right before Him, there has been, there is, and there will be singing and music. *It should come as no surprise, then, that the longest book in the Bible, the Old Testament book quoted most frequently in the New Testament, is a hymn-book, the book of Psalms.* God loves)to hear His people sing His praises, and so He included the Psalms as a major part of His inspired Word.

The book of Psalms is probably the most loved and the best known part of the Bible. This book has been valued throughout the history of the church. Martin Luther called it " *a Bible in miniature.*" He said " *in the Psalms we look into the heart of every saint.*" John Calvin said that " *in the Psalms we look into a mirror and see our own heart.*" A.C. Gabelein used to say that " *a psalm a day*

keeps worry away. " A modern commentator put it this way, "*Every psalm seems to have my name and address on it*" The book of Psalms is the book of human emotions. No matter what mood you may be in there is a psalm to give expression to that mood. The book of Psalms is the hymn book and prayer book of Israel in the Old Testament. The Psalms is probably the most unusual book of the Bible. For example,

The Psalms is the largest book in the Bible, containing 150 psalms.

Psalm 119 is the largest chapter in the Bible, containing 176 verses it has more verses than many other short books of the Bible.

Psalm 117 is the shortest chapter of the Bible, containing only two verses. It's also the middle chapter of the Bible, the very centre of the 1189 chapters found in Genesis through Revelation.

Psalm 118:8 is the central verse of the Bible.

The book of Psalms is written by more authors than any other book in the Bible.

The Psalms is the most quoted Old Testament book in the New Testament. There are 360 Old Testament quotations in the New Testament, do you know how many are from the Psalms ? 112 are from the book of Psalms.

The book of Psalms contains more Messianic prophecies than any other Old Testament book, other than possibly Isaiah.

It reveals the Messiah, the Lord Jesus as the Son of God (Ps 2) and Son of Man (Ps 8) it speaks about Him in His obedience (Ps 40:6-8) betrayal (Ps 41:9) crucifixion (Ps 22:1) resurrection (Ps 16) ascension (Ps 68:18) 'pd enthronement (Ps 110) No wonder Christians say, "*this is the book where I have found help in the crisis of life.* " " *If I only take one book of the bible with me to a desert island it would be the book of Psalms.* " Like a hymn book the Psalms is very difficult to analyse but let's notice firstly.

(1) THE TITLE OF THE BOOK:

(a) THE HEBREW TITLE:

Is "*Tehillim*," which means "*Praises*." Another Hebrew title is "*Tephiloth*," which means "*Prayers*," a title taken from (Ps 72:20) where we read, "*the prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.*" So Psalms is both a hymn book and a prayer book. It can be used in private life or public worship. It shows the saint on his knees in every mood of life, amidst conflicts and triumphs burdens and blessings. Sometimes he is penitent, sometimes pleading, sometimes praising, he is nevertheless always praying and so should we. So the entire collection of Psalms is entitled "*Praises*," in the Hebrew text. But,

(b) THE GREEK TITLE:

Called it "*Psalms*. " The Septuagint (DCX) which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament labelled it "*Psalms*. " (Lk 20:42 Acts 1:20) The word "*psalms*, " comes from a Greek word which means " *the plucking of strings*. " It means a song to be sung to the accompaniment of a plucked or stringed instrument such as a harp or lyre. So the Psalms is a collection of worship songs sung to God by the people of Israel with musical accompaniment. This collection of 150 Psalms constituted Israel's ancient God breathed (2 Tim 3:16) " *hymn book*," which defined the proper spirit and content of worship. My the Psalms is the " *book of Praise's*," given to assist believers in the proper worship of God. This book is the irreplaceable devotional guide, prayer book and hymnal of the people of God. (1)

(2) THE TIMING OF THE PSALMS

Can we put this book of Psalms into some sort of historical setting ? Well, the Psalms cover a long period of Jewish history, about 900 years from the time of Moses about 1410 BC to the time of the return from the Babylonian exile about 430 BC. So these Psalms were composed over a span of almost 1,000 years. You see, we can ascertain the timing of these Psalms,

(a) BY THE BACKGROUND:

Look at (Psalm 90:1) Now do you see here the superscription at the beginning ? " *A Prayer of Moses the man of God*. " About 116 Psalms have a superscription

like this which identify it's author, historical context and how it should be sung. Now although these superscriptions were not part of the original text they are considered accurate and reliable. Psalm 90 was probably the first Psalm written. Composed by Moses during Israel's forty years of wilderness wanderings (1445-1405 BC) perhaps around 140 BC. That's the first Psalm but what was the *last* Psalm ? Look at Psalm 126. Do you see 'the opening verse ? This is thought to have been recorded after the time of Israel's Babylonian captivity, during their return to the land of Judah about 430 BC. So the first Psalm was composed by Moses, the last Psalm is thought to be have been recorded after Israel's time in Babylon. But the vast majority of Psalms were written during the Kingly reigns of David (1020-970 BC) and Solomon (970-931 BC) around 1000 BC.

My can you see the span of years that are covered by the Psalms ? From about 1400 BC which is the time of Moses to about 430 BC which is the time of Ezra. So we can see the timing of these Psalms by considering (a) but also by considering,

(b) THE BOOKS:

You see, the book of Psalms is actually five books in one and actually divides into five sections each one with its own theme. Each of these five books in the book of Psalms ends with a doxology and each corresponds to the five books of Moses. So sometimes folk refer to the book of Psalms as " *The Pentateuch of David*, " because they are thought to mirror the first five books of the Bible,

which are known as " *the Pentateuch of Moses.*" The Hebrew scholar Delitzsch has said, " *The Psalter is also a Pentateuch, the echo of the Mosaic Pentateuch, from the heart of Israel. It is the fivefold book of the congregation to Jehovah as the Law is the fivefold book of Jehovah to the congregation.*" So what are we saying ? We are saying that these five books of the Psalms correspond's to the first five books of Moses. Let's consider this for a moment.

Book 1: Takes us from Psalm 1 to 41: Do you see how Book 1 ends with a doxology ? (Ps 41:13) Now because this first book highlights God's power in creation (Ps 8, 19) and is dominated by the theme of sin and redemption it's easy to see how it could correspond to the book of *Genesis*.

Book 2: Takes us from Psalm 42 to 72: Do you see how Book 2 ends ? (Ps 72:19) Bible scholars have noted that this second book of Psalms focuses on Israel's ruin and redemption and this can be said to the book of *Exodus*, which tells us about Israel's redemption from Egyptian bondage.

Book 3: Takes us from Psalm 73 to 89: Do you see how Book 3 ends ? (Ps 89:52) Now the Psalms in Book 3 centre primarily on the holiness of Israel's sanctuary and this coincides with the concern of the book of *Leviticus* with the tabernacle and holiness.

Book 4: Takes us from Psalm 90 to 106: Do you see how Book 4 ends ? (Ps 106:48) Now these Psalms clearly

correspond to *Numbers* the fourth book of Moses. I mean this group of Psalms begins with one written by Moses and ends with one that recounts Israel's rebellions in the wilderness.

Book 5: Takes us from Psalm 107 to 150: Do you how Book five ends ? (Ps 150:6) Now this fifth book focuses on the sufficiency of God's Word (Ps 119) and the universal praise of God's name. (Ps 146-150) And is this not the emphasis of the Book of *Deuteronomy* which is the fifth book of Moses ? It's all about God and His Word. So the book of Psalms is actually five hymn books grouped together. But who wrote these Psalms ? Well, Psalms is one of the rare books of the Bible written by several people who wrote from many different experiences of life. For example David " *the sweet psalmist of Israel,*" (2 Sam 23:1) is the chief author of the Psalms. He is credited with writing 75 of the 150 psalms. (3-9 Ps 2 with Acts 4:25 Ps 95 with Heb 4:7)

The sons of *Korah* a guild of singers are also credited with writing ten psalms. (Ps 42 44-49 84-85 87) *Asaph*, a priest who served as a worship leader of ancient Israel wrote twelve Psalms. (Ps 50 73-83) *Solomon* also wrote some Psalms. (Ps 72 & 127) Quite a lot of the Psalms are anonymous though *Ezra* who was a scribe and priest of Israel is thought to be the author of some of the anonymous Psalms. Now, as we have seen many of these Psalms have roots which are deep in Hebrew history so one good way of studying them is to observe the circumstances that gave them birth. (1) (2)

(3) THE TYPES OF PSALMS

You see, there are three basic ways to study the Psalms.

1. By Book Division: And we have seen that each of the five books ends with a doxology.
2. By Authorship: And we have noted that the Psalms have a variety of authors.
3. By Subject Matter: And we can classify certain Psalms according to their subject matter. For eg there are,

(a) *THE DEVOTIONAL PSALMS:*

These contain personal and precious promises which all believers can feed upon. These Psalms include both sobbing and singing. The authors at times will pout, doubt and shout. Here the naked soul of man is revealed as perhaps in no other writings. Let's look for a moment at Psalm 13. Now do you ever feel like that ? One popularly held misconception about the Bible is that its heroes were men who differed entirely from other men. They never suffered defeat, they never became discouraged, they were at all times successful, saintly and supremely happy. My nothing could be further from the truth. The fact is that all of them were " *subject to like passions as we are.*" (Jos 5:17) These men all bore the bitter burden of defeat, they were at times overwhelmed with despair.

Look at Psalm 56. Do you see (Ps 56:8) ? Fancy that. God puts our tears into His bottle. You see, when Jewish people wanted to express their sympathy at the death of

someone they loved, they didn't send flowers or wreaths to the funeral. *Do you know what they did ?* They had glass bottles about 4 inches high which they could hold under their eyes and weep into. They would then send the bottle of tears to the bereaved relatives as an expression of sympathy. Do you know something ? God is able to do the same for us. God puts your tears into His bottle. He sympathises with you. Burdened believer, do you realize that " *Standing somewhere in the shadows you'll find Jesus.*" (a)

(b) *THE PENITENTIAL PSALMS:*

These are the Psalms of penitence or " *sorry psalms.*" Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143, are all penitential Psalms. Look at the best known of them, which is Psalm 51. Do you know what its all about ? The consequences of sin in the life of a believer. What happens when a Christian sins ? Well, look at (51:8) then (51:12) Now David did not say, " *Restore unto me Thy salvation,*" he had not lost his salvation, but he did lose the joy of it. *You see, when God saved you He did not fix you up where you could not sin anymore. He just fixed you up where you could not sin and enjoy it.* The most miserable man on earth is not an unsaved man, the most miserable man on earth is a man out of fellowship with God. For he has lost the joy. How would you like to take a test and find out if you are backslidden or not ?

Is there in your heart this moment, joy unspeakable and full of glory ? There's only thing that can take the joy out of your heart. Not two, or three, or four, but one. What ?

Sin. Furthermore only one kind of sin. Would you like to know what kind ? Yours. *"Make me to hear joy and gladness. " (Ps 51:8)* My when there is unconfessed sin in our lives nothing we hear sounds good. We attend church and we lash out. The soloist was flat, the office-bearers were unfriendly, the pastor was too long. Everything we hear is wrong. Do you know why ? Its because we are wrong. You are wrong. The joy is gone. I wonder do you need to pray ? *"Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, "* (a) (b)

(c) *THE IMPRECATORY PSALMS:*

Now to imprecate is to pray against, or to invoke evil on someone or something. Some of the Psalms that fall into this category are Psalm 35, 55, 58, 59 and many more. Look at Psalm 35. Now some Christians have difficulty with these Psalms. They say, *" how can we reconcile these Psalms with the teaching of Christ ?"* For did not the Lord Jesus say, *" Love your enemies bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you ? "* (Matt 5:44) So people say, *" why do these Psalms sound so violent while the New Testament seems to talk about love and forgiveness."* Well, if we put ourselves in the place of the Psalmist we will see that the enemies he faced are the same enemies we face today, or as the New Testament tells us, *"for we wrestle not against flesh and blood."* (Eph 6:12)

Sometimes we forget who our real enemy is. We thank that the person who opposes our plans, attacks our

reputation, or exasperates us in some way is our enemy. No, people may hurt us, but people are not our true enemies. My our battle is against Satan and his forces. And there is another enemy we face, not external but internal. Do you know what it's called ? *The flesh.* (Gal 5:19) And the flesh will war against us as long as we dwell in these mortal bodies. Now do you see who our real enemy is ? The world, the flesh and the devil. My Flo we not need to deal severely with these enemies ? And are the imprecatory Psalms not a picture of the way we must deal with the real enemies, Satan, the world system he controls and our own fallen flesh. (a) (b) (c)

(d) *THE ASCENT PSALMS:*

" The Songs of Ascents," take in Psalms 120-134. Look for a moment at Psalm 121. Do you see the three important words at the top of the psalm ? *"A Song of Degrees, or Ascents."* Now what does that mean ? Well, the Hebrew word *"Degrees, or Ascents,"* comes from a root that means *" to go up,"* as ascending a stairway. You see, in those ancient days, the Israelites would travel to Jerusalem about 2700 feet in elevation for the three annual feasts. (Exod 23:14-19) Coming from whatever distant town they called home, the pilgrims would make the long journey by foot, walking with their family and friends and enjoying their holiday travel. They were eager for good times in the Holy City, seeing friends again over the feast and making sacrifices to the Lord. *Now as they journeyed to Jerusalem they would sing these psalms together.* Has your family ever enjoyed a sing-along during a holiday journey in the car ? *Have you ever sung on your way to*

church, preparing your hearts for worship ? It must have been a great comfort for them to be reminded of God's care for them as they travelled. My what about our spiritual journey ? For these psalms are not limited to ancient history, but contain essential truths for our journey through this life, to our eternal home. So do you see now that there are different types of Psalms ? (a) (b) (c) (d)

(e) *THE HALLELUJAH PSALMS:*

These six Psalms (113-118) known also as the " *Hallel Psalms*," were song on the night of the Passover. The Jews sang Psalm 113 and 114 before the meal and before drinking the second festal cup. Then at the close of meal, at the time the fourth cup was filled they sang Psalms 115-118. Can you picture the Lord Jesus at the head of the table gazing into the wine that spoke so eloquently of His blood soon to be shed ? Can you hear His rich voice as He raise the tune and rings out the words of Psalm 113 ?

*Ye servants of the Almighty King
In every age His praises sing
Where'er the sun shall rise or set
The nations shall His praise repeat*

So He sang Psalms in the Upper Room. He quoted them on the cross. You see, when we meditate on the Psalms we are pondering pages loved by our Lord. Indeed this brings us naturally to the fourth thing we want to say about the Psalms.

(4) THE TESTIMONY OF THE PSALMS

For the Psalms testify of Christ. Do you remember what the Risen Lord said to His disciples in the Upper Room ? " *All things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses and in the prophets and in the psalms concerning me.*" (Lk 24:44) My the Psalms reveal the person and work of Jesus Christ. These Psalms are called the Messianic Psalms and there are about fifteen of them. As Irving Jensen says, " *some of the Old Testament's most minute prophecies of Christ are found here. They are about His person (God and man) His character (righteous and holy) His work (death and resurrection) and His offices (priest, judge and king)*" These Messianic Psalms foretell the two comings of Christ. They speak about,

(a) *CHRIST'S COMING TO REDEEM:*

Look at Psalm 22. What a graphic picture we have here of crucifixion. Now its important to remember that Christ did not quote David, David quoted Christ for the Spirit of Christ told David the words the Saviour would utter 1,000 years before the event. Isn't that amazing ? Moreover is it pot amazing that this Psalm speaks of "*pierced hands and feet*," (Ps 22:16) centuries before the Romans used crucifixion as a method of execution. One of the greatest " *I am*," statements of Christ occurs in this Psalm. Do you see (Ps 22:6) ? " *But I am a worm and no man.*" My Christ stooped so low to lift so little. Surely as we read this Psalm we have to say with the hymn writer,

*But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed*

*Nor how dark was the night that the Lord went through
Ere He found His sheep that were lost*

(b) CHRIST'S COMING TO REIGN:

You see, Psalm 16 prophesies His resurrection, Psalm 68 speaks of His ascension into heaven, Psalm 110 speaks of the priesthood of Christ, but Psalm 2 speaks of His coming to reign. Look at Psalm 2. Here is a Psalm that predicts the destruction of the heathen in the time of the Tribulation, and the Millennial Reign of Jesus Christ. I mean can you see here,

Christ's Sonship: Ps 2:7

Christ's Sovereignty: Ps 2:8

Christ's Severity: Ps 2:9

One moment the Beast will be strutting across the world and the armies of mankind will be drawn to Megiddo to oppose Christ's coming reign. The next moment the Beast and his armies will be gone and "*Jesus will reign*," What about,

(5)THE THEMES OF THE PSALMS

Well, there are a number of themes that are running throughout the Psalms. Let me limit myself to three. There is,

(a) THE WORSHIP OF GOD:

The Psalms tell us a lot about God's actions, that is what You see, a vast number of the Psalms are devoted to the

theme of worship. Now what is worship ? A.W. Tozer said, "*Worship is the missing jewel in the evangelical church.*" The English word "*worshiP*," derives from "*worth-ship*," that is the one who is worthy. The Greek word *axios* meaning "*worthy, deserving*," was the cry of the spectators at the Greek games when the victor appeared. And surely we can re-echo the words of the twenty four elders in the book of Revelation. "*Thou art rorthy 0 Lord to receive glory and honour and power for thou hast created all things and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*" (Rev 4:11) You see, God is to be worshipped,

1. For Who He is: His Attributes:

And the Psalms tell us a lot about His attributes. Do you recall Psalm 48 ? "*Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised.*" Do you know Psalm 115 ? "*Not unto us 0 Lord not unto us, but unto thy name give glory for thy mercy and for thy truth's sake.*" Do you recall Psalm 139 ? Here is a psalm that describes God's *Omnipotence*: He is all powerful, it describes God's *Omniscience*: He is all knowing, it describes God's *Omnipresence*: He is everywhere. My as we prepare for worship let's not forget who God is. Do you not think that if we were mindful of who God is there would be a spirit of reverence among us ?

2. For What He has done: His Actions:

He does. In Psalm 8 the psalmist says, "*When I consider*

thy heavens the work of thy fingers the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained. What is man that thou art mindful of him ? " In Psalm 78 the psalmist says, "*Marvellous things did God in the sight of their fathers in the land of Egypt.*" Continually we hear about two major acts in the Psalms **Creation and Redemption**. Now is this not the benchmark of true worship ? God is to be worshipped for Who He is and for What He has done. Now if modern day worship is to be judged by this criteria there is a lamentable lack. So many modern songs are self-centred and experience orientated. Then again in conservative churches like ours so often we exhibit a low view of worship when we rush through "*the preliminaries*," to reach the message as soon as possible. My do we not need to take time "*to be still and know that He is God ?*"

(b) THE WALK WITH GOD:

My there are Psalms for every occasion of life. If you are happy and want to express your joy try Psalm 66. If you are grateful and want to express your thanks pray the words of Psalm 40. If you are troubled by fear read Psalm 91. If you are discouraged read Psalm 42. If you feel lonely read Psalm 62. If you are worried try Psalm 37. If you are struggling with bitterness try Psalm 94. If you feel forsaken immerse yourself in the comfort of Psalm 88. Most people recognise Psalm 46 as the basis for Martin Luther's marvellous hymn "*A Mighty Fortress is our God* " That hymn was published in 1529 at a critical time in Martin Luther's life. You see, during the traumatic days of the Reformation Luther often became discouraged,

sufferings bouts of despair and even depression. The entire world he felt was against him. But in those dark and difficult hours he would turn to his co-worker Philip Melanchthon and say "*Come Philip let us sing the psalms.*" And they would often sing a version of Psalm 46 set to music.

**A sure stronghold our God is He
A timely shield and weapon
Our help He'll be and set us free
From every ill can happen**

You see, the Psalms encouraged, strengthened and fortified Luther in his daily walk with God. My do you have trouble knowing how to pray ? Well take the Psalms and pray them back to God. Do you have difficulty overcoming doubt and depression? Go and live for a while in the psalms. Do you have a fear of death ? The psalms will help you put death where it belongs. My use the Psalms in your walk with God.

(c) THE WORD FROM GOD:

For what Psalm is the largest chapter in the Bible ? Its Psalm 119 containing 176 verses. My here is a Psalm that extols the Word of God. There are twenty two sections with eight verses each. Each section begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Here is a man who is bound to the Word of God not by the chains of *law* but by the magnetic attraction of *love*. You show me a man who loves the Lord and I will show you a man who loves the Word. Tell me, is the Bible your greatest treasure ?

We have noticed that the Psalms fall into different groups let me give you a "**Psalm Sandwich**," as you leave. You see Psalms 22-24 form a very important group. *They are like a sandwich though people tend to lick the jam out and leave the bread.* What do I mean ? Well these three

Psalms belong together. *Psalm 22 is the Psalm of the Cross: Psalm 23 is the Psalm of the Crook: Psalm 24 is the Psalm of the Crown. In Psalm 22 we see our Substitute: In Psalm 23 we see our Shepherd: In Psalm 24 we see our Sovereign. In Psalm 22 we see our Substitute Pardons: in Psalm 23 we see our Shepherd Protects: in Psalm 24 we see our Sovereign Prevails. In Psalm 22 we have the Good Shepherd Dying for the sheep: In Psalm 23 we have the Great Shepherd Living for the sheep: In Psalm 24 we have the Chief Shepherd Coming for the sheep.*

In Psalm 22 Christ died to care of the Penalty of sin: in Psalm 23 Christ rose to take care of the Power of sin: in Psalm 24 Christ is coming to take care of the presence of sin. In Psalm 22 Christ takes care of our Past, in Psalm 23 He takes care of our Present, in Psalm 24 He takes care of our Future. Does that not want to make you shout, "**Hallelujah what a Saviour ?**" In the words of the Psalmist "**Praise ye the Lord.**" Ps 150:6