

# HOW TO STUDY THE PSALMS

## What are the Psalms?

- A collection of prayers written by Old Testament saints *to God*. They are (mostly) musical poems, originally written in Hebrew.

## What's the point of the Psalms?

1. The Psalms teach us about God and His ways, and how to respond to Him and the world around us.
2. The Psalms teach us how to express ourselves to God. They teach us what to say and how to feel.

*In short...*

The Psalms teach us **how to pray**.

## Who wrote the Psalms?

- David — 73+ Psalms
- Asaph — 12 Psalms
- The Sons of Korah — 11 Psalms
- Solomon — 2 Psalms (72 & 127)
- Moses — 1 Psalm (90)
- Unknown/Other — ~51 Psalms

## Themes in the Psalms

- Imprecation — I.e., calling down God's judgment on enemies: Psalms **2, 3, 5, 7, 10** . . . *a lot!*
- Thanks — Thanking God should always be at the center of our prayers. Psalm **9**, Psalm **30**, Psalm **65**, etc.
- Praise — The Psalms teach us to simply praise God for who He is: Psalm **8**, Psalm **96**, etc.
- Confession — Psalm **32**, Psalm **51**, etc.
- Deliverance — Desperate cries for help! Psalm **130**, etc.
- Messianic Psalms — Psalm **2**, Psalm **22**, Psalm **118**, etc.

## "Types" of Psalms

1. Lament (most common type) — Express struggles, suffering, or disappointment to the Lord
2. Thanksgiving
3. Hymn of Praise
4. Salvation History Psalm — Rehash some portion of Israel's history and praise God for His deliverance
5. Psalm of Celebration or Affirmation
6. Wisdom Psalm
7. Song of Trust

## A Reminder about Parallelism in Hebrew Poetry:

1. Synonymous parallelism — Second/subsequent line repeats/reinforces the sense of the first line  
Isaiah 44:22 — "I have swept away your offenses like a cloud,/your sins like the morning mist."
2. Antithetical parallelism — Second/subsequent line contrasts the thought of the first  
Hosea 7:14: "They do not cry out to me from their hearts,/but wail upon their beds."
3. Synthetic parallelism — Second/subsequent line adds to the first line by providing further information.  
Obadiah 21: "Deliverers will go up from Mount Zion/to govern the mountains of Esau./And the kingdom will be the LORD's."

## What are we supposed to do with the imprecatory Psalms?

*“Imprecatory Psalms” are those that call down God’s judgment on enemies.)*

### **Imprecations are not just for Old Testament believers! Here are some New Testament curses:**

- “If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed.” 1 Corinthians 16:22.
- “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!” Galatians 1:8–9.
- “Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds.” 2 Timothy 4:14–15.

*Notice, particularly in the last example, that Paul’s comfort is not in getting personal revenge on Alexander, but in the fact that judgment is in God’s hands. With this in mind, he doesn’t have to worry about judging Alexander himself.*

### **Some Principles:**

- God is the one who judges, not man. The Psalmist always calls God to judge. And God always judges righteously. He must. It’s in His character.
- Knowing that God judges rightly in the end enables us to forgive our enemies now.
- We may only ask God to judge our enemies insofar as our enemies are God’s enemies. David, who wrote most of the Psalms, was the LORD’s anointed; therefore, his enemies were God’s enemies.
- David was a type of the true King, God’s perfect Anointed/Messiah/Christ, Jesus. This is why the people of Jerusalem shouted “Hosanna to the Son of David!” when Jesus rode into the city on a donkey.
- Christ will crush all of His enemies under our feet, and we should rejoice in this truth.
- When we pray for God to have mercy and save our enemies, we’re still asking Him to pour out His wrath on their sin. We’re simply asking that He will pour out that wrath on Christ instead of on the persons themselves.
- God may also cause harm to His enemies in order to bring them to repentance.
- It is merciful for God to kill a wicked man and bring his wicked deeds to an end. This is especially the case when the wickedness is oppression of others.

*“Righteous retribution is one of the glories of the divine character. If it is right that God should desire to exercise it, then it cannot be wrong for his people to desire him to exercise it. It may be objected that, while he claims retribution for himself, he forbids it to them, and that he has thereby forbidden all satisfaction in it to them. The fact is true; the inference does not follow. Inasmuch as retribution inflicted by a creature is forbidden, the desire for its infliction by a creature, or pleasure therein, is also forbidden; but inasmuch as it is righteously inflicted by God, it must be right in him, and must therefore be, when in his hand, a proper subject of satisfaction to the godly.”*

—R. L. Dabney

*“What is the relationship between God’s revenge and ours? Paul answers: ‘Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord’ (Rom. 12:19). Neither in the Old Testament nor in the New is there a place for personal revenge. All of our vengeance must be given over to the Lord. Every impulse to gratify ourselves by avenging a wrong done to us is surrendered to the Lord as we truly follow Him.”*

—James E. Adams,  
*War Psalms of the Prince of Peace*