

BOOK OF PSALMS

1. This is probably the most loved and well-read book in the Bible. It is universally loved regardless of culture or age. This is because people can connect easily with the experiences, struggles, joy etc. expressed by the writers. The psalmists poured out their hearts to God in both complaints and joy. Unlike other scriptures, such as the book of Leviticus, which can be a little religious (because it is targeted at the Levites/Israelites), this book conveys a very personal relationship with God which is applicable to everyone.
2. It is said that in the book of Psalms, we look into the heart of every saint, as if we are looking into the mirror and seeing our own hearts. It is also easy to use the Psalms for various purposes like encouraging others, etc. In the Old Testament are many Jewish types of some truths in the New Testament. Christians (who are not Jews) find it hard to understand these and are unable to connect the Old Testament to our modern Christian life and the New Covenant. In contrast, they can easily connect with the Psalms. This is why this book is so well-received and loved by today's Christians, including young believers.
3. "Psalm" is a Greek word for a string instrument which is plucked. The Israelites' version of the Psalms has nothing to do with a string instrument. To the Hebrews, Psalms are "Songs of Praise". Since these are songs of praise and worship, this book is placed centrally in the Bible because worship is to be central to our relationship with God. God loves us and loves our worship and praise.
4. This book of Psalms has a total of 150 chapters making it the longest book in the Bible. This is because worship should be the biggest part of our Christian life. The Bible says that whether we eat or drink, we should do it all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)
5. The book of Psalms is placed right after the book of Job. Job is a book of suffering, of struggles in life which we all go through. The reason for this positioning is that even though life is full of suffering, we should realise that God has a plan for us and we can still worship and praise Him in the midst of our sufferings. Romans 8:28 is an assurance that all things in our life happen for our good. Therefore, both the book of Job and the Psalms are placed right in the middle of the Bible. That is the beauty of the Bible.
6. This book of Psalms was authored by many writers over a span of more than 1000 years. There is no other book in the Bible that took 1000 years to complete.
7. While there were many writers, more than half of the psalms were written by King David.
8. The psalms usually have an "introduction" or a "superscription". Most of these superscriptions are musical instructions for the choir master of worship as the psalms were sung in the Temple. Some of the superscriptions are names of the writers or a brief description of an event for which the psalm was written. An example is Psalm 51 which King David wrote to express his repentance to God after he fell into sin with Bathsheba.

9. Psalms are Hebrew poetry but they may not sound to us like a poem because in English poetry rhymes (same sounds) and rhythm are important. Hebrew poetry does have rhythm by parallelism. This means they are written in pairs of sentences. For each pair, the second sentence highlights or emphasizes the first one. For example:

- a) Psalm 27:1. The two statements in this verse sound almost the same or synonymous. The second sentence emphasizes the first, that with God, we have no fear.
- b) Psalm 78:14. This verse says, "In the daytime also He led them with a cloud, and all the night with a fiery light." In this verse, opposites of day and night are used but the statements are still parallel and both are on the same subject about God's leadership.
- c) Psalm 71:8. This verse says, "Let my mouth be filled with your praise and with your glory all the day." In this case, amplification is being used. While praise and glory are not exactly the same, both are used to amplify the point that we should be praising God and lifting Him up, all the time.

Hence, psalms should be read aloud or be listened to but never be read in silence. As they are poetry, they should not be analysed too much or their beauty will be lost. Doing so would be like cutting up a masterpiece of art (such as the Mona Lisa). It is best appreciated by expressing it aloud for everyone to listen to.

10. Typically, the pronoun "I" (rather than "We") is used in the Psalms which means that the Psalms can be used very personally. The pronoun "we" is usually used in national repentance or congregational worship or rejoicing.

11. Most churches of the past (and some of today's traditional churches) read through the Psalms systematically. Some even chanted the entire 150 psalms in a single day. Some churches did not sing hymns but only psalms. Psalms sound natural when sung in Hebrew. Modern churches no longer read the Psalms but tend to pick only certain verses in bits and pieces, which is a pity.

12. What is the Structure of this book of Psalms?

- a) There are 5 sections in this book and each section is a collection of psalms.
- b) Each of the first 4 sections ends with the word "Amen".
- c) Section 5 ends with a collection of 5 psalms (i.e. Psalms 146 to 150) praising the Lord. All these 5 psalms begin and end with the phrase, "Praise Ye the Lord". The phrase "Praise Ye the Lord" is the Hebrew way of saying, "Hallelujah!" Hence, this is a book of praise.

13. The introduction of the entire book of Psalms is in Psalms 1 and 2. This introduction gives us the purpose of this book.

- a) Psalm 1:2 tells us to "delight in the law of the LORD". It is not a discipline or duty to read God's Word. The Bible is given to us to delight in, so is the book of Psalms. Blessed is the man who delights in and meditates on God's Word day and night. Instead of just spending 10 minutes of quiet time a day to read a verse or some devotional materials written by other people, we should go directly to the Bible and read the Word of God to know Him ourselves.

- b) Psalm 2 is about Christ. Verses 7 and 8 tell us that Jesus is the beloved Son of God. The last line of this psalm says, "Blessed are all who take refuge in Him". This refers to those who put their trust in Christ.
 - c) Psalm 1 is about the Law and Psalm 2 is about God's Son, Jesus Christ. The whole idea or purpose of the Bible is for us to love God's Word because in His Word, we see the precious Son of God. The Bible is beautiful because its focus is on how beautiful our God and Saviour Jesus Christ is! The Psalms is full of Christ. Many prophecies on Christ are seen in the Psalms. For example, the sufferings of Christ in His 1st coming can be seen in Psalm 22.
14. The Bible is about Jesus Christ, our wonderful Saviour, who loves us and is so patient and gracious to us. We can only know Him through the Bible. We should not only choose certain verses to try to create a god of our own imagination, like a prosperity god or a "Santa Claus" god. Our God is in the entire Bible! The book of Psalms says that we are to "Delight in the Law" and to "Delight in the Lord". Let us focus on the beautiful truths of God in this beautiful book!