

Route 66

Psalms: Practical Worship

Part 19 – September 27, 2009

The Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70^{AD}. It's gone. The furnishings are gone, the decorations are gone, the vestments are gone, everything's gone ... except the hymnbook! Psalms was the songbook of the temple.



You're looking at a photo of the "Psalm Scroll". It's part of the Dead Sea Scrolls that were found in 1956. The Psalms Scroll was written in the time of Jesus (ca. 30-50 BC), and contains portions of chapters 101-150. The original Hebrew title was "Praises". And the Greek word, "Psalms" means: "Songs sung to the accompaniment of the harp". Originally, this collection of 150 poems, hymns, and prayers were written to be accompanied by a harp and a ten-string Lyre.

It is good to praise the Lord and make music to your name, O Most High, to proclaim your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night, to the music of the **ten-stringed lyre** and the melody of the **harp**. - *Psalm 92:1-3 NIV*

The ten-stringed lyre is simply a smaller, more portable harp.



This box (dating before the time of Abraham) was discovered in 1929 in a king's tomb in Mesopotamia (Iraq) and it depicts a man playing the lyre. (Notice the bull's head.)



In that same tomb they found the (4,500 year old) lyres! How cool is that?! Can you see the bull's heads? One of these was made of silver. And it's been restored.

The words *lyre* and *lyric* have the same Latin root (*liris*).

When King David was young, he was employed by King Saul to play the soft sounds of his lyre to soothe Saul's nerves. (*1 Sam 16:23*) About half of the Psalms are attributed to David. And according to the Psalms Scroll, David wrote a total of 3,600 songs!



This ten-stringed lyre is a replica of the type used in the Second Temple (after the exile in Babylon). It was constructed by Levites, in Jerusalem, and patterned after an image on an ancient temple coin.

It's important to keep in mind that the Psalms are lyrics! That's how they were designed to be perceived and appreciated.

I want to read you something:

I bet you're wondering how I knew about you're plans to make me blue with some other guy that you knew before. Between the two of us guys You know I love you more. It took me by surprise I must say, when I found out yesterday. Don't you know that I heard it through the grapevine? Not much longer would you be mine. Ooo, I heard it through the grapevine. Oh, and I'm just about to lose my mind. Honey, honey, yeah. - *I Heard It Through the Grapevine* by Marvin Gaye

We can't help but do this to the Psalms when we read them! We don't have the tunes that go with them; and the words are translated from a different language; and they don't rhyme!



Ancient Hebrew poetry doesn't even rhyme in its native language. Hebrew poetry repeats *ideas* instead of *sounds*.

The poet makes a one-line statement; then in the following line, for emphasis and clarification, he repeats it, contrasts it, or extends it.

Be merciful to me, O God, for men hotly pursue me; all day long they press their attack. *My slanderers pursue me all day long; many are attacking me in their pride.* - Psalm 56:1-2 NIV

Because of this technique, Hebrew poetry translates into *any* language (unlike poetry characterized by rhyme or meter)!

Several Psalms open with instructions similar to Psalm 56:

To the tune of "A Dove on Distant Oaks." - *Psalm 56 Intro. NIV*

But, then we dryly read, "Be merciful to me, O God, for men hotly pursue me; all day long they press their attack." They'd be going: "Come on! You're mutilating it. Where's the soul?! Where's the feeling?! It's to the tune of "A Dove on Distant Oaks" - we *love* that melody. Sing it like you mean it!" But we can't. We only have the lyrics, which is why so many modern-day worship leaders set the Psalms to their own music.

Finish this line:

Give thanks to the Lord, our God and King ... *His love endures forever*

For He is good, He is above all things ... *His love endures forever*

That's "like" how Psalm 136 was meant to be read. All the Psalms were married to passionate, expressive music to deepen their impact on the heart and mind of the listener.

There are basically two major categories: Praises and Laments

1. The “praises” are like: “Oh Lord, we love you. You’re faithful and majestic! We thank you. We’re in awe of you!”
2. The “laments” are like: “Hey, God! Where the *devil* did you go?! What’s going on?!” Why have you abandoned me?!

Most of the Bible teaches us *about* God and *what* He has done. The Psalms help us to experience God emotionally. They aren’t theological position statements to be scrutinized and studied, as much as they’re emotional expressions (of both joy and sorrow) to be felt and experienced.



The Cave of Adullam

A good example of praise is the Psalm of thanks that David wrote while taking refuge in this cave, the cave of Adullam [uh-DUHL-uhm].

Before he got here, he was on the run from the jealous King Saul, and had fled to the city of Gath.

But he’s captured and taken to King Achish [AY-kish]. What’s he do?! It’s over! He’s terrified. In a panic he prays and God gives him this crazy idea to drool on himself and act ... well, *crazy!*

Achish said to his servants, “Look at the man! He is insane! Why bring him to me? Am I so short of madmen that you have to bring this fellow here to carry on like this in front of me? ... David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam. - 1 Samuel 21:13-22:1a NIV

The explanation at the beginning of Psalm 34 says: “When [David] pretended to be insane before Abimelech” (a royal title). You may begin to notice how each idea is presented in two ways.

I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. My soul will boast in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together. I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them. Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. ... The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. ... The Lord redeems his servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him. - Psalm 34 NIV



1867 painting by F. Hayez

A “lament” is a cry of sorrow and grief. One of the best and most notorious examples is Psalm 137.

It was written *in* Babylon *after* the temple was destroyed and Jerusalem was sacked and burned.

On the way to Babylon, the captors order the temple harp players to play and sing happy tunes. But, in revolt (as they pass a grove of poplar trees), they hang their harps in the branches.

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land? ... O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us — he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks. -
Psalm 137 NIV cond.

This last line is so harsh and horrific. It's clear that the Jews were very comfortable singing about their grief and anguish with a frankness that we'd find impossible to justify as worship! But remember: wherever we find a difficulty, a discovery awaits!

Look at what is a very critical statement: "happy is he"

- A. The word "happy" isn't referring to a sense of emotional joy over someone's suffering, but to being *blessed* or *rewarded*.
- B. And "he" refers to those on the *right* side of God's wrath.

More than a lament, this is a declaration of prophesy by Isaiah, concerning the wrath of God that was coming against Babylon.

See, the day of the Lord is coming — a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger ... I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless. Whoever is captured will be thrust through; all who are caught will fall by the sword. **Their infants will be dashed to pieces before their eyes** ... See, I will stir up against them the Medes ... Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, the glory of the Babylonians' pride, will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah.
- Isaiah 13:9-19 NIV condensed



Cyrus the Great

Isaiah sees (200 years into the future) Babylon getting a dose of its own barbaric medicine at the hands of a pagan nation. Remember how Isaiah had also prophesied that some guy named Cyrus would conquer Babylon, and then help the Jews to rebuild their (second) temple? (*Isaiah 44:24-45:4*) In this separate prophesy, Isaiah even foretells who Cyrus will lead: "I will stir up against them the Medes"

In 549^{BC} Cyrus the Great conquered the Median Empire, accepted the crown of Media, and led them ultimately against Babylon!

This song isn't about laughing when babies are savagely murdered; it's a desperate cry for God's justice, and a declaration of trust in God's promises in the midst of grief, agony, and abuse.

- Sorrow is worship when it's expressed with hope in God!

God isn't looking for narrow religious protocols; he desires the full breadth of expression of the human heart: joy *and* sadness; victory *and* defeat; success *and* failure; contentment *and* regret.

Nearly half the Psalms qualify as laments. Listen to the opening of Psalm 42, written by a brokenhearted, exiled Jew:

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. ... My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" - *Psalm 42:1-3 NIV*

And then listen to how he ends this song:

Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. - *Psalm 42:3;11 NIV*

It's the pain and despair and pleading that make the notes of persistent faith and hope and trust so rich and meaningful.

And mixed within these praises and laments are glimpses of Jesus!

Q: Have you ever noticed that Jesus said:

Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the **Psalms**. - *Luke 24:44b NIV*

He's woven throughout the lyrics! Psalm 22 paints an incredible portrait of the crucifixion. It opens with his lament:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? - *Psalm 22:1a NIV*

And it closes with his triumph:

They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn — for he has done it. - *Psalm 22:31 NIV*

And in-between, it precisely describes the scene, down to the piercing of his hands and feet, and the gambling for his clothes. Of the thirteen major Old Testament quotes in the Gospels, nine come from Psalms, and five of *those* come from Psalm 22!

The Psalms provide us with: a model of praise and worship, a source of comfort in times of trouble, and a potent reminder that God is in control!