

Introduction to the Psalms (Selected Scriptures)

Well, today, we are starting a new series of messages. We're going to be going through the Psalms. And don't lose heart at that because we're not going through all of the Psalms and we're not going through it at the pace that we went through the book of Hebrews. We covered some of the Psalms as we went through the book of Hebrews. In fact, you may remember that in Hebrews 1, the author quotes a number of Psalms there, Psalm 2, Psalm 45, Psalm 97, 102, 104, and Psalm 110. And then the book of Hebrews also makes reference to and quotes from Psalm 8, Psalm 22, 40, 95, and 118, meaning that the book of Hebrews quotes eleven different Psalms in those thirteen chapters. So, we dipped our toes a little bit into the Psalms, into the Psalter, while we were working through Hebrews, and we're going to take a closer look at some of them in the weeks ahead.

I first—I should say it this way. I have had a desire to do this series since May of 2014. I know that seems oddly specific, and that is because in May of 2014, I preached two sermons on Psalm 73, the prosperity of the wicked, which became a book that was published in 2017. And since 2014, I've had a desire to preach through Psalm 37, which answers the question of the prosperity of the wicked, the same issue as Psalm 73, but from a different vantage point. So, Psalm 37 and 73 are kind of mirror images of each other; 37, 73, you see what the Lord did there? They're kind of mirror images of each other. And I referenced Psalm 37 a number of times in the book, *The Prosperity of the Wicked*, and now I've always wanted to preach through it. So, I've kind of been waiting. I've been rushing through the book of Hebrews so I could get done and get to this series on the Psalms. Really, this series on the Psalms is just an excuse for me to preach Psalm 37, but that's not the only Psalm we're going to tackle. We're going to tackle four of them that I know for sure, and possibly a fifth one.

And here are the ones that I plan on tackling: Psalm 1 and Psalm 2. Now, there's a reason we're beginning at the beginning with those because those two psalms really form the gateway to the Psalter. They are, in many ways, mirror images of each other. They, in many ways, sort of set the tone and frame the theology and the message of the entire Psalter. They're not there by accident. They're there by design. So, we're going to begin with Psalm 1 and 2, and then I'm going to preach through Psalm 37, which deals again with the prosperity of the wicked, and then we're going to look at Psalm 49, which answers the folly of trusting in riches. So, they all kind of deal with that subject of the righteous and the wicked, and there may be more psalms. I might add one or two to the

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end of that list. I don't want to really end with Psalm 49. That's where I plan on ending right now, but I'm always open to throwing another psalm at the end of this just because Psalm 49 sort of ends on a bit of a dour note.

So look at Psalm 49. We'll read the last few verses; I want you to see how this ends. Psalm 49, beginning at verse 16, you can see how this answers the folly of trusting in riches. Psalm 49:16:

16 Do not be afraid when a man becomes rich, when the glory of his house is increased;

17 for when he dies he will carry nothing away; his glory will not descend after him.

18 Though while he lives he congratulates himself—and though men praise you when you do well for yourself—

19 he shall go to the generation of his fathers; they will never see the light.

20 Man in his pomp, yet without understanding, is like the beasts that perish.
(Ps. 49:16–20 NASB)

That's sort of a good punctuation mark to end that psalm with, but it is a bit of a downer. So there may be other psalms that I work into that.

This series, these psalms are not long psalms. Psalm 1 is six verses. Psalm 2 is twelve verses. Psalm 37 is the longest of the four with forty verses, and Psalm 49 has twenty verses, and they share something in common. All four of these psalms deal with the wicked and God's perspective on them, and the righteous and God's perspective on the righteous. So all four of the psalms have that in common, and I think that dealing with psalms that address the prosperity of the wicked is sort of a great way to spend our election year before we move up to November. I'm down for it. I want to get God's perspective on the wicked and the righteous and the end of both, and that's what these psalms do.

A number of the psalms, in fact, all four of the ones that we are going to be looking at, have elements of imprecation. Now, if you were here at the beginning of the year for adult Sunday school class, I did a series on the imprecatory psalms. An imprecation is a desire, a prayer for, or a request for God's judgment upon His enemies. It is a cursing of enemies. And you see this prolifically in the psalms. In fact, we noticed in that series

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that two-thirds of the Psalms have elements of imprecation in them, either descriptions of God's judgment, promises of God's judgment, mentions of God's judgment, or in some cases outright prayer for God to judge the enemies of the righteous—that is, the wicked. Outright prayers or curses upon the wicked.

Now, there is a theological framework in which we are to understand those imprecations. We don't dismiss them. We don't sort of write them off or anything like that, and we don't spiritualize them. I'm not suggesting that you pray for God's judgment on the wicked, but you could probably pray for God's judgment on the wicked. That's the message of the imprecatory psalms. If you can do it in a theological way, the way that Scripture suggests that we should view the wicked, then there is room for asking God to do away with the wicked. One of the songs that we sang here today, did you read it? Psalm 106, “And the wicked shall be no more.” And it was actually a prayer that you sang for God to deal with the wicked. That is a biblical and righteous prayer.

Now, if you weren't here for the Sunday school class, much of what I'm going to be giving you here is in two full messages that I gave introducing the Psalms, and that Sunday school class is available online. I would commend it to you. And if you always sort of wrestled with the idea of imprecations and curses in the Psalms, I would just commend that to you. There's eight sessions that we did in January, February, March, or February, March, and April of this year. And those are available for you to get a little bit of background on that. I'm going to deal with a few of the imprecations as we work through the Psalms but not as thoroughly as we did during the Sunday school hours.

Now, it's time to sort of introduce you to the Psalter. And some of this is going to come from the series that I did in the Sunday school lessons. Some of this or most of this is new. But it is necessary that we have some idea of the kind of book that we're going to be in for the next several months. This is not going to be a long series. Well, not long comparative to other things. Like Hebrews is long, John was long, I get that. This is not going to be Hebrews long or book-of-John long. It might feel long, like Ecclesiastes long. That was short, but it sort of felt long. This is going to be somewhere in the middle of all of that. I don't know how many weeks this is going to take. It's not going to be four. So if you thought Psalm 1, Psalm 2, Psalm 37, Psalm 49, you're going to be sorely disappointed by the time we get to this time next year and you're like, OK, sounds like we're wrapping this up.

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But I want to give you a brief sort of description of what this book is, the book of Psalms. Its themes, its theology, its structure, and a little bit of an understanding of the genre that we're going to be dealing with. So this is not going to be a typical sermon where we have a text that I give you an exposition of or an explanation of. It's going to be a sort of selection of some passages from the Psalms. And I'll ask you to turn to some of them. I'll just simply read some of them to you. But I want to give you an appreciation for the Psalms so that you see the value of the Psalter, not just in our worship but also in our day-to-day lives in terms of application.

First, let's deal with a few misconceptions about the Psalms. This is a book of songs. They were part of Israel's worship. It would be most like a hymnal that we would have, a collection of songs that we would use for different occasions. This was part of the nation of Israel's worship, and there were songs that were sung at certain occasions, like we have Christmas songs and Easter songs. There were songs that were sung at different holidays, different occasions. Some of the Psalms were sung at different events, like a wedding event or like ascending the hill of the Lord to come up into worship and to offer the yearly sacrifice. Some of them were sung at holidays. Some of them were part of just traditional worship exercises. Some were accompanied by various instruments. In some of the superscripts of the Psalms, you can see references to some of the instruments; they would say, "For the choir director, to be sung with . . ." and it would give you an instrument that it would be sung with. So there's some notations as to the instruments that the Psalms were written for.

Here's the first misconception about the Psalms, and maybe many of you would already know this because I've mentioned this before in reading some of the Psalms, but one misconception people have is that the superscripts above the Psalms are unimportant. You'll see likely in your translation a smaller typeface above many of the Psalms, not all of them, but above many of them, a little introduction that tells you something important about the psalm. Now, there's some debate as to whether or not those were inspired Scripture written by the author in every instance, or whether they were added later as the Psalms were compiled together, but they are important because they contain introduction. Sometimes the author of the psalm is mentioned, the occasion upon which the psalm was written, which allows us to sort of put that psalm in its redemptive historical context. Sometimes the instrument upon which the psalm was to be sung is mentioned, or even the purpose of the psalm.

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And since you're in Psalm 49, you'll notice before verse 1 that there is a superscript there. It says, "For the choir director. A psalm of the sons of Korah." That tells us there was a group of men who wrote this psalm, and it was directed for the choir director, indicating that it was intended to be sung—Psalm 49 was—intended to be sung corporately or congregationally with the people.

Look at Psalm 51. Turn a page or two in your Bible. Psalm 51. Look at the superscript there: "For the choir director. A psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba." So that tells you that Psalm 51, as you read about the confession and repentance and David's sin—it tells you the occasion upon which the psalm was written. He's confessing a certain particular, very notable sin, the sin with Bathsheba.

A second misconception is that these are songs, and so they are theologically shallow and thus unprofitable. And you kind of read through them and just sort of skip over them because they're just songs after all. Now, if you're used to thinking of songs in the terms of the way that we tend to write songs today, then you go into the Psalter and begin to read that, you're going to be struck with just how different, how theologically rich the Psalter is. "I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart. Where? Down in my heart. Where? Down in my heart. I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart, down in my heart to stay" (Cooke, "Joy, Joy Down in My Heart"). "If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands. If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands" ("If You're Happy and You Know it"). Now, if that's your idea of worship you're going to be sorely disappointed by the Psalms. But if you want songs and worship that is grounded and driven by truth about God and His work, then the Psalms is where you would turn for that. It is an incredibly rich, profoundly rich, theological book, as you're going to see here in just a moment.

A third misconception about the Psalms is that the Psalms are a random collection of songs. As if there were some songwriter in the nation of Israel who sort of jotted out a song and thought, "You know what? That'll sing. That's a good one. That's one of my better ones. We should probably add that to the book that we call the Psalms. All right, well, let's throw that sort of in at the end. What number are we at? We're at forty-two. OK, well, this one will be number forty-three, and then grab another one. That's a really good one, too. We should probably throw that one in." That's not how it worked. The Psalms are not a random collection of songs. They're not compiled sort of helter-skelter in a scattered fashion or a thoughtless fashion.

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In fact, there is a structure to the Psalms that is mind-boggling. And I spent an entire hour in the Sunday School series on the structure of the Psalms. You will notice before verse—before number one—in fact, if you just turn back a couple of pages from Psalm 49 to Psalm 42, you'll notice that prior to Psalm 42 there are the words “Book 2” there. Book 2. That is because the Psalter is divided into five books. Five books. The first book is Psalms 1–41. The second book begins at Psalm 42 and goes to Psalm 72. The third book is Psalm 73–89. The fourth book is Psalms 90–106, and the fifth book is Psalms 107–150. And there is a structure there that you will see if you observe the meaning and the message of each of the Psalms. And as I said, I spent a whole hour on this in Sunday school, and I'm not going to belabor this right now, but each of those five books, they build one upon another. The first two books deal with David and his kingdom and the King that is promised to him. The third book deals with the sin and the failure of the nation of Israel and the seeming abandonment of God's people by God. The fourth book looks forward to the return from exile after the Babylonian captivity, and the fifth book celebrates the return of the people to the land after the Babylonian captivity. So there is a structure to those five books, and it is a magnificent structure. In fact, within each of those five books, there is a theological framework that each psalm unfolds. And then you zoom in on each individual psalm, and there is a theological and poetic structure to each individual psalm.

You know what a fractal is? A fractal is one of those designs created by a mathematical algorithm, a mathematical formula, and no matter how much you zoom in or zoom out, you see these varying levels of design. That's what the Psalms are. Dig into one verse of the psalm and you see structure and magnificence and parallelism there that is beautiful, theology there that is beautiful. Then you zoom out to the structure of the entire psalm and you see a whole other structure and a whole other theology and a beauty that is mind-boggling. Then you zoom out to the level of the book itself, Book 1, Book 2, Book 3, 4, or 5 and you see a whole other structure of how all those Psalms are composed and compiled together. And then you zoom out to the perspective of the entire Psalter and you find a book that is written over a thousand years of Israel's history. It's the only book in Scripture that's written over a thousand years. It's a magnificent structure. It is not a helter-skelter, random collection of songs that sort of struck the hearts of people. There is a theological purpose behind the positioning of the Psalms, the ordering of the Psalms, and the creation of them, and the way that they are laid out in the Psalter.

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The focus of the Psalter is the King that is promised to David and to David's line, and the book of Psalms is all about this King whom we know to be the Lord Jesus Christ. It describes His kingdom, His rule, His person, His work. It is about David, and David as a type of that coming King. James Johnston in his commentary on the Psalms says this: "With this in mind, Psalms are about Christ in several ways. On the one hand, they make specific predictions that were fulfilled in Christ. On a deeper level, the Psalms point forward to Christ through the life, words, emotions, and experiences of King David as a whole. David is a model of the great King to come." So what he is saying is in the Psalms, we see David, his emotion, his experiences. David becomes the prototype or the foreshadowing of a greater King who is to come from David's line. King David was a man who was chosen by God to be king. He was God's man to be king. And David rules over the nation of Israel, and he is persecuted by his enemies and even by other nations. And through the obedience of David to God's Word, the people of Israel were blessed. So David, in his obedience to the Word of God, becomes the vehicle through which God blesses His people through that abundant and peaceful and glorious reign of King David. And then David rules on behalf of Yahweh as Yahweh's representative. So you can see how that looks forward to the Lord Jesus Christ. There is coming One from David's line who was the greater son of David. He is God's chosen Man to rule on David's throne. And He will rule not over Israel but over the nations and over the entire world. And that rule and reign will be a conduit of immense blessing and prosperity to the people of God. Jesus Christ becomes the fulfillment of the Davidic picture that we see in the book of Psalms.

Now, the Psalms are poetry. This is the next point or the next—this isn't really an outline. I'm not even going to pretend this is an outline. The Psalms are also poetry. It is a book written in poetic style, but it is Hebrew poetry. It's not poetry like you and I are familiar with in the Western world. It's Hebrew poetry. It's not the rhyming of words like you find in great American poetry written by Dr. Seuss or Shel Silverstein or Robert Service. I mean, he wrote probably the best piece of English literature to ever be penned in the English tongue, *The Cremation of Sam McGee*. And that poem is just a brilliant, brilliant rhyming of words. You don't get that in Hebrew poetry. You don't get the rhyming of words at all. In fact, it is the rhyming of ideas in Hebrew poetry. Now that might sound like a cop-out. Oh, sure, you just say it's the rhyming of ideas because you can't put forth the effort to rhyme your words. That sounds like a cop-out, doesn't it? Yeah, like some modern poet who can't rhyme words, who just vomits words out onto a page and hits return every once in a while to make it look like it's in stanza form and

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doesn't do punctuation or capitalization or anything like that and then vomits it up at a convention and calls it poetry or something like that. That's not actual poetry. That's not what we mean when we say it's the rhyming of ideas. We mean that inside of Hebrew poetry, it is the first part of a line and the second part of a line—that they complement each other. It is the ideas of Hebrew poetry that rhyme and match with one another.

And there are various ways that they do this. For instance, and I'm not going to go into all of these but just to give you an idea of what you're going to see in the weeks to come as we notice some of these rhyming ideas in the Psalms that we're going to be looking at, sometimes the words or the ideas rhyme as synonyms where you have the first line that makes a statement and the second line repeats that first statement but using different words to kind of add a bit of a different shade to it. It's the same thing stated from a different perspective so that you see two different descriptions of the same idea or the concept.

Sometimes the lines rhyme in the sense of being opposites, whereas the first line and the second line are not synonymous, but they're sort of mirror images or opposites of each other so that you have something stated positively and then something stated negatively. So they become antagonistic rhyming with one another with the same thing described from the positive side and the negative side.

Sometimes the rhyming is an elaboration. The second line sort of gives more information. The first line says something, the second line adds more information, like adding a phrase on and another description on and gives you more information as the concept of the first line is elaborated upon in subsequent lines.

And sometimes it is a climactic parallelism, meaning that the first line is stated and then the second line sort of takes it to the next level, emphasizes it, and sort of brings it up a notch, stating it in an even bolder and more graphic way than the first line does. And there are seven different kinds of parallelism in Hebrew poetry. And we'll cover some of them as we have a chance to observe them.

But what I do want you to see here is the brilliance of the providence of God in giving us a book of inspired poetry that does not rhyme the words but the ideas because the emphasis, or I should say the impact of English poetry that rhymes the end of each line or the words, the emphasis is lost and the substance of it is lost when you translate it into another language. Because other languages, their same words, their translations, don't rhyme like ours do. And so sort of the import of it, the punch of the rhyming, can

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be lost when you translate it into another language. But with Hebrew poetry, it doesn't matter what language you translate it into, the impact is still there. The substance is still there. The theology of it is still there. By God's good providence, He gave us Hebrew poetry and not Dr. Seuss. Dr. Seuss wouldn't translate into another language. But Hebrew poetry does.

And it makes it theological writing because the ideas rhyme and the phrases and the truths mirror each other and parallel one another. That makes it incredibly theological writing, meaning that the truth, the ideas, take center stage and not the rhyming of the words. And this is intended to engage the mind in worship, which is really what worship is. It is not the playing of the emotions like the way we play an instrument, but it is the communication of truth out of a heart and that truth that informs and shapes the emotions. And the Psalms are designed to theologically inform and shape our emotions and our sentiments and our thinking.

This leads us to the next thing. The Psalms are theological, or the Psalms as theology. God is a God of truth. Psalm 31:5 says, "You have ransomed me, O Lord, God of truth." And Jesus said, "God is a spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). And if God is a God of truth, then we would expect that our worship should be truth-driven. And that is what you find in the book of Psalms. The Psalms point us to the Word of God. In fact, the Psalms begin with the Word of God. Psalm 1:1–2 says, "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night." And then Psalm 119, which I would argue—we read that earlier—Psalm 119 is sort of the hinge upon which one of the theological points of the book of Psalms turns. Psalm 119:1–2 says, "How blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord. How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, who seek Him with all their heart." So the Psalms point us to the Word of God.

Second, the Psalms teach us about God's character and His nature. Psalm 50:6: "The heavens declare His righteousness, for God Himself is judge." The Psalms declare that God is a righteous judge and that He is gracious and compassionate. Psalm 116:5: "Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yes, our God is compassionate." Psalm 90:2 says He is eternal: "Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God." The eternity of God and thus His immutability are expressed in the Psalms. Psalm 78:38—He is a forgiving God.

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Yes, He is a righteous judge, but He's also compassionate. Psalm 78:38: "But He, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity and did not destroy them; and often He restrained His anger and did not arouse all His wrath."

The Psalms describe God's justice, love, long-suffering, wisdom, faithfulness, uprightness, grace, compassion, forgiveness, omnipresence, trustworthiness, glory, righteousness, lovingkindness, power, perfection, truth, worthiness, mercy, patience, knowledge, holiness, goodness, and His rule and His reign. To study the Psalms is to study a systematic, inspired commentary on the nature of God. It is also to see God in His various capacities in how He relates to us. For the Psalms describe God as a rock, a refuge, a strong tower, a protector, provider, savior, redeemer, deliverer, promise-keeper, a king, a judge, our portion, our shield, our help, our peace, our sustainer, reward, a watchman, a shepherd, and a creator. Now the Psalms don't just mention those things. The Psalms describe those things. In fact, the Psalms implore us to meditate upon those things and then to worship in light of those things. So it is all about the nature of God.

Third, the Psalms describe as theology the works of God. They recount the works of God from creation to the captivity. I told you that the Psalms are the only book of Scripture written over a thousand-year period of time. So you have something written by Moses and you have something likely written by Ezra. And most people regard Ezra as the compiler of the last three books of the Psalter. David is the compiler of the first two books of the Psalter, Book 1 and 2. David compiled those, which is why, by the way, Book 2 ends with, "And the Psalms of David are finished," or completed, I think it says. But then you go later in the Psalms and you see all of these other psalms because those first two books David did during his lifetime, but the rest of the Psalms were written over that period of time and used in worship but then compiled by Ezra later on after the Babylonian captivity.

The Psalms describe the works of God from creation all the way through the captivity, which is really the end of the Old Testament era, the book of Malachi and the end of the book of 2 Chronicles. Psalm 33:6–9—listen to how creation is described:

6 By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host.

7 He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deeps in storehouses.

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8 Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.

9 For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast. (NASB)

Psalm 105 describes the covenant that God made with Abraham:

5 Remember His wonders which He has done, His marvels and the judgments uttered by His mouth,

6 O seed of Abraham, His servant, O sons of Jacob, His chosen ones!

7 He is the Lord our God; His judgments are in all the earth.

8 He has remembered His covenant forever, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations,

9 the covenant which He made with Abraham, and His oath to Isaac.

10 Then He confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant,

11 saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion of your inheritance." (Ps. 105:5–11 NASB)

And then Psalm 105 goes on to describe the famine that led the children of Israel down into the land of Egypt, Joseph being sold into slavery, Joseph's rise to power in Egypt, Israel going down to Egypt, their slavery, and then Moses and their deliverance through the ten plagues and the exodus. That's all in Psalm 105.

Other events described in the Psalter include the flood in Psalm 29, Melchizedek in Psalm 110, the exodus and Israel plundering the Egyptians in Psalm 105, the parting of the Red Sea in Psalm 106, the giving of the law at Sinai in Psalm 68, the provision of quail and manna and water in Psalm 78 and Psalm 105, the sacrificial system in Psalm 50, Israel coming into Canaan in Psalm 105 and 106, Israel's monarchy in Psalm 18 and Psalm 45, God's covenant with David in Psalm 89, Israel's disobedience in Psalm 74, 78 and 79, the Babylonian captivity in Psalm 137 and the return from the Babylonian captivity in Psalm 126. So from creation all the way to the end of the Old Testament, every major redemptive and theological event is described in the Psalter, which means if you are to study the book of Psalms, you're going to study all of the major events of the Old Testament because all of them are boiled down into the book of Psalms.

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And here's what the psalmists do: they take those events and they say, "Here is the truth behind those events. Thus, this is the God that is behind those events. Now worship and adore Him," so that the truth of God's work and His person become the foundation and the ground of our worship and our obedience. To study the Psalms is to study all of the works of God in the Old Testament and to see everything that happens in terms of His perspective and of worshipping Him and praising Him, and you get His perspective on all that He does and all that He is. That's the book of Psalms.

Finally, the Psalms are used frequently in the New Testament. When I say finally, I don't mean that we're near the end of this, I just mean finally in this little list that I have going here. The Psalms are used frequently in the New Testament. They are the most quoted book from the Old Testament in the New Testament—is the book of Psalms. The most quoted book. Jesus and the apostles cited the Psalms frequently, which shows the value that the Psalms had to Jesus and to the apostles. Jesus used the Psalms to silence His opponents, quoting Psalm 8, 118, and 110 in Matthew 21 and 22. Peter quoted the Psalms to justify replacing Judas in Acts 1. He quoted Psalm 69. Peter and Paul proved the resurrection of Christ from Psalm 16. They did that in Acts 2 and Acts 13. Paul taught justification by faith from Psalm 32. He did this in Romans 4. Peter in 1 Peter 3 quotes Psalm 34 to show how we are to respond to evil treatment and persecution. And then Hebrews quotes the Psalms to show the superiority of Christ in chapter 1. It doesn't sound to me like Jesus and the apostles ever got the memo that they needed to unhook the Old Testament from the New Testament, does it? Those men's lives were shaped by the Psalter because that was their worship.

And not only is the Psalms the most quoted book in the New Testament, there is one particular psalm that is the most quoted passage in the New Testament, and that's Psalm 110, verses 1–2 and verse 4. "The Lord says to my Lord: 'Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.' The Lord will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, saying, 'Rule in the midst of Your enemies'" (vv. 1–2). And then Psalm 110:4: "The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.'" Remember, we quoted that psalm or saw that psalm quoted quite prolifically in the book of Hebrews, and some would argue that the book of Hebrews is an exposition of Psalm 110. And I wouldn't argue with that assertion, which means that one entire book of your New Testament is an exposition of one psalm from the Old Testament, drawing upon all the other books in the Old Testament as well.

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Now, here's the value of the Psalms. They help us think biblically. They help us think biblically. They reveal the God that we worship. They call us to think upon His works and His nature. They call us to meditate upon these truths and to speak these truths to our souls, to think about God properly, which is the foundation of our worship. If we worship God as we perceive Him to be, then we are worshiping an idol. And so our minds and our hearts must be informed by the truth of who God actually is and what He has done so that we might worship God in spirit and in truth. And the Psalms help us to do that.

The second value of the Psalms is that their language is intended to engage the hearts and the minds as we read it. The language used is graphic, it is colorful, and I don't mean graphic as in profane, I mean it is stark, it is graphic, it is clear, it's colorful, it's rich. So for instance, the psalmist could have simply written, "The people are sad," but he doesn't. In Psalm 80:5, he says, "You have fed them with the bread of tears, and You have made them to drink tears in large measure." So in your mind, you imagine a loaf of bread that is baked, and it's tears, it's baked in tears, and then you chase the bread of tears by drinking tears, by guzzling tears in large measure. Look at the vivid language. He could have just said, "We are sad. Yes, we're sad. Yes, we're very, very sad. Make us glad, make us glad, make us very, very glad." He could have said that, but he doesn't say that. Instead, he says, "You make them eat the bread baked in tears, and then You make them guzzle tears in large measure." Graphic language that grips your heart, grips your mind. It sticks with you.

"You have made Him happy"—the psalmist could have said that. But instead, the psalmist in Psalm 45:7 says, "You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of joy above Your fellows." Poured out the oil of joy on you so that it runs down across you and just permeates everything and soaks up everything on your being. You see the language there, the oil of joy. Not just happiness but joy.

He could have said, "Protect me," but instead the psalmist says in Psalm 17:8, "Keep me as the apple of the eye; hide me in the shadow of Your wings." That's not to say that God has wings, but it is to say that that protection close to the side of our God, like a mother hen might cover its chick with her wing, God does this with us, puts us under His wing and protects us. He hides us like the apple of His eye, not letting anything come at and attack that thing. We instinctively shut our eyes and guard our eyes and protect them.

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The psalmist could have said they tell lies, but instead, Psalm 5:9 says, “There is nothing reliable in what they say; their inward part is destruction itself. Their throat is an open grave; they flatter with their tongue.” Look at that imagery, an open grave. Nothing but putridness and stench comes out of their mouth. That's vivid language. Not just that they tell lies, but their mouth is an open grave. And the psalmist in Psalm 73 could have said the wicked speak proudly, but listen to the imagery that he uses in verses 8–9. They mock and wickedly speak of oppression; they speak from on high. They have set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue parades through the earth.” You catch that? Just their tongue, like with legs on the bottom of it, the tongue just marches around, boasting out its boastful, prideful remarks. That type of imagery just sticks in your head. The Psalms are intended to capture our emotions, to capture our mind, to stick with us, and to put stuff in the most vivid and graphic and colorful language because it is poetry.

And then the Psalms also help us to feel biblically, not just to think biblically but to feel biblically. They express emotion. In fact, it is difficult to think of a human emotion that is not expressed in the book of Psalms. The Psalms express loneliness, discouragement, fear, confidence, disappointment, anxiety, hopefulness, hopelessness, love, shame, peace, happiness, doubt, grief, sorrow, exultation, excitement, exaltation, gratitude, frustration, and despair. You'll find all of those emotions in the book of Psalms.

But more than that, the book of Psalms connects those emotions with the truth of God's Word and gives us—and this is one of the most important, valuable parts of the book of Psalms—the Psalms give us God's perspective on our emotions. So that I have my emotions—it's OK to have my emotion. It's OK to emote in the sense that I express that emotion, I'm aware of that emotion, I feel the emotion, I get it. But then the Psalms make me take the Word of God and the truth of God and put that over top of my emotions so that I can see my emotions in truth, the goal being that those emotions then are informed and conformed to the truth and informed by the truth. So I get God's perspective on my despair, on my hopelessness, on my sadness, on my anxiety, on my frustration.

And you see this happening in the book of Psalms when the psalmist will say, “Why, O soul, are you downcast within me? Why, O soul, are you in despair?” And then they express that angst and the anxiety and the stress and the grief of that. And then the psalmist will speak to his soul and say, as if he pulls his soul out of his own heart and says, “Now, soul, I will tell you what is true. Here is what is true. God is on His throne.

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God is good to those who love Him. God will reward the faithful. God will destroy the wicked. Do not be in despair. Do not be downcast. Do not be anxious. Because the truth of God tells me that I have these emotions, yes, but these emotions are not right in their proper perspective.” And the Psalms give me God's vantage point on my emotions so that I can address my own soul and my own emotions through the Psalter as I inform it with the truth of what God has done and who God is so that my emotions and my soul can be shaped by the Word of God and shaped by that truth.

And it's all in the context of worship because the purpose of the Psalms is not just to do that but to do that so that my heart may issue out in worship to God for who He is and what He has done. That's the purpose of the Psalter. James Johnston says this: “The Psalms wake up our emotions to respond to God and to life like we should.” Let me pause there for a second. Life is very difficult, and sometimes the wicked in this life triumph. And sometimes the righteous do not prosper in this life. Sometimes the righteous are afflicted and they suffer. That is all true. That is all in the Psalms. The purpose of the Psalms is to wake up to the reality of what life is really like and to see it from God's perspective. So here's that line again, or that quote again. “The Psalms wake up our emotions to respond to God and to life like we should. No other book so powerfully shapes our minds and our hearts. Through the Psalms, we can adapt our thinking and feeling to be in line with the heart and the mind of God.” That is the value of the Psalms.

So in this book, we're going to see God's perspective on life, particularly the righteous and the wicked, and we're going to see the end of both. We're going to feel the weight of sin and also get the relief of forgiveness and graciousness in our sin. We'll be challenged to think deeply about God, His character, His works, and His will, and we'll meditate upon a God who calls us to worship Him with joy and to enjoy the blessings of His grace and of His Word. That is the value of the book of Psalms.

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