



Lesson 1 (Psalm 2)

REMEMBERING THE WAY OF THE PSALMS

This lesson aims to immerse us in the book of Psalms so that we will be ready to dig into individual psalms in the lessons ahead. Volume 1 used Psalm 1 in the introductory lesson; here in Volume 2 we will use Psalm 2, as we make our way into the riches of this book. To delight in and meditate on the Psalms is a lifelong process. It is good to step back from time to time in that process and remember just what makes up the book of Psalms. Here's one way to say it: *The Psalms are cries from the kingdom that focus on God the King, voicing the true experience of kingdom life through poetry fit for a King!*

DAY ONE—THE PSALMS ARE CRIES FROM THE KINGDOM

- I. The huge majority of psalms were composed in the context of the kingdom of Israel, with King David as the

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most common writer. From the two following passages, what can you observe about this context of King David and the kingdom?

a. 2 Samuel 23:1–7

b. 1 Chronicles 16

2. As David led his people in worship of God, the Psalms formed a great part of that worship, often by being sung. The word *psalm* comes from the Greek translation of the Hebrew word for *song*.
 - a. Now that you've read 1 Chronicles 16, notice and comment on some of the psalms' titles, such as in Psalm 4: "To the choirmaster, with stringed

instruments. A Psalm of David.” Look specifically at Psalms 4–6 and 73–83.

- b. How might all this historical context affect our reading and understanding of the Psalms?
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3. David clearly knew he was inspired by God’s Spirit to write these words (2 Sam. 23:2). As we approach the Psalms as part of the Scriptures breathed out by God, what are some of the implications for how we should study them (and perhaps also how we *shouldn’t*)? (See also 2 Timothy 3:16.)

The Psalms light up God the King: his creation of the world, his sovereign hand over all creation, his judgment of sin, and his promised forgiveness and deliverance for those who repent and turn to him. All these ways of God are made known to us fully in Jesus Christ his Son. The Psalms focus us on God—and they point us to Christ (sometimes quite directly, as in Psalm 2, and sometimes more indirectly). Finally, on this day, read and meditate on all of Psalm 2, in light of the fact that it points to Christ. (*Christ* comes from the Greek translation of the Hebrew *anointed*.)

DAY THREE—THE PSALMS VOICE THE TRUE
EXPERIENCE OF KINGDOM LIFE

- I. The Psalms light up the eternal King, but they do it in the voices and from the experience of real people living in his kingdom. Many have observed the amazing breadth of human experience touched on by the Psalms. Page through the first ten psalms, for example, skimming just the first few verses of each. What various experiences and tones do you find represented?

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4. Psalm 119 is a prayer celebrating God's Word and asking God to help us walk in its light through all the experiences of life to the end. Read Psalm 119:25–40, praying these verses particularly in relation to your study of the Psalms. Write down and meditate on a couple of verses that stand out.

5. What kinds of prayers might Psalm 2 teach you to pray?

DAY FOUR—THE PSALMS GIVE US
POETRY FIT FOR A KING!

The Psalms are poetry! This poetry is not just an extra decoration to be noticed if we have time. Studying the form of a psalm is a crucial part of studying (and delighting in) the meaning. We'll notice three aspects of this Old Testament poetry.

- I. First, *poetic shape*. Poetry comes in various forms, but in the Psalms it comes in the form of 150 separate poems, each with its own shape from beginning to end. Sometimes the shape is quite clear; sometimes it's debatable. Sometimes there is more than one possible shape. If your Bible edition divides the text into sections for you, it's a good idea not always to take those divisions as fact but rather to read the text and see for yourself. Psalm 2 falls rather neatly into four sections—like a kind of drama in four acts, each with a distinct voice emerging.
 - a. Identify four sections of Psalm 2. What title and brief description might you give to each one?

- b. Now look at the four sections together, as they move from beginning to end of this poem. How do they hold together? Explain briefly how we might see these sections developing one main idea or train of thought.

As we look at each poem, we will aim to find its main idea—a central theme that holds it together from beginning to end. For Psalm 2, for example, we might conclude that the main idea is something like: *God has set his anointed King over all the nations.* That could sum up the four sections, which show three different perspectives on that anointed King followed by a warning about him. Another possibility might be: *God's anointed King over all nations will bring judgment on all who rebel.* The more we come to know the psalm and its whole shape, the more clearly we will be able to get at the main idea.

2. A second aspect of Hebrew poetry is *parallelism*. Hebrew poetry comes in parallel units of meaning, often two but sometimes three or more units, which in English

we see as lines on the page. Three kinds of parallelism are generally acknowledged:

- antithetic parallelism (The lines offer contrasting ideas.)
- synonymous parallelism (The lines offer similar ideas.)
- synthetic parallelism (The lines develop an idea from one line into the next, in a number of possible ways.)

Psalm 2 is full of synonymous parallelism, in which a second line basically repeats an idea, *but always with differences that deepen the meaning*. Find and comment on two examples of synonymous parallelism in Psalm 2.

3. A third aspect of this poetry is its *imagery*. Poetry in general uses concrete pictures to communicate—pictures like those of “bonds” and “cords” in Psalm 2:3.
 - a. What do these pictures in Psalm 2:3 make you see and understand?

DAY FIVE—TAKE IT IN

We've developed this summary of what makes up the book of Psalms: *The Psalms are cries from the kingdom that focus on God the King, voicing the true experience of kingdom life through poetry fit for a King!* We've glimpsed the promised King Jesus, who brought the kingdom to us; God sent his own Son (this King!) to dwell among us. It was this King who died in our place, the perfect sacrifice to accomplish the forgiveness of our sins.

One more thing needs to be clear: we are called to respond. Jesus came proclaiming the gospel and calling people to respond in faith. The whole Bible is God's voice to us, and by his Spirit we are called to respond.

- I. The Psalms teach us well how to respond! For example, in the fourth and final section of Psalm 2, the psalmist calls kings and rulers to respond rightly to God's anointed King (see verse 10—and recall verse 2!). How might the kinds of responses in Psalm 2:10–12 be especially important for any kind of earthly ruler? How do these verses reach out to apply to any of us as well? Spend some moments in prayer, taking time to respond personally to your heavenly King.

2. The final day of each lesson will ask you to reread the psalm(s) studied and to choose a verse or passage you would like to memorize. Let's begin with Psalm 2. Write out your chosen verse or passage and commit it to memory (or begin to do so!). Make these words a part of your thinking and your prayers. Be ready, if you wish, to tell your group why you picked these words and how they are working in your heart. By the end of the study, with regular review, you should have a collection of personal treasures from the Psalms.