

PSALMS

A 12-WEEK STUDY



Douglas Sean O'Donnell

Knowing the Bible: Psalms, A 12-Week Study

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S E R I E S P R E F A C E

KNOWING THE BIBLE, as the series title indicates, was created to help readers know and understand the meaning, the message, and the God of the Bible. Each volume in the series consists of 12 units that progressively take the reader through a clear, concise study of that book of the Bible. In this way, any given volume can fruitfully be used in a 12-week format either in group study, such as in a church-based context, or in individual study. Of course, these 12 studies could be completed in fewer or more than 12 weeks, as convenient, depending on the context in which they are used.

Each study unit gives an overview of the text at hand before digging into it with a series of questions for reflection or discussion. The unit then concludes by highlighting the gospel of grace in each passage (“Gospel Glimpses”), identifying whole-Bible themes that occur in the passage (“Whole-Bible Connections”), and pinpointing Christian doctrines that are affirmed in the passage (“Theological Soundings”).

The final component to each unit is a section for reflecting on personal and practical implications from the passage at hand. The layout provides space for recording responses to the questions proposed, and we think readers need to do this to get the full benefit of the exercise. The series also includes definitions of key words. These definitions are indicated by a note number in the text and are found at the end of each chapter.

Lastly, to help understand the Bible in this deeper way, we urge readers to use the ESV Bible and the *ESV Study Bible*, which are available in various print and digital formats, including online editions at www.esvbible.org. The *Knowing the Bible* series is also available online. Additional 12-week studies covering each book of the Bible will be added as they become available.

May the Lord greatly bless your study as you seek to know him through knowing his Word.

J. I. Packer
Lane T. Dennis

WEEK 1: OVERVIEW



Getting Acquainted

To most Christians, the Psalms¹ are familiar (we read, quote, and sing them) but also foreign (we struggle with the original setting as well as certain geographic places, theological themes, ancient poetic forms, and possible musical terms—like “Selah”²). With 150 Psalms to cover, we certainly won’t be able to cover each Psalm in depth. We will, however, cover main themes and significant connections to Christ.

The Psalms are often called “the heart of the Old Testament.” This is not only because if you open your Bible to the middle (the “heart” of it), you will likely open to a psalm, but also because they work on our hearts. John Calvin said of the Psalms, “I have been wont to call this book not inappropriately, *an anatomy of all parts of the soul*; for there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror.” Psalms is a collection of 150 poems that express a wide variety of emotions, including: love and adoration toward God, sorrow over sin, dependence on God in desperate circumstances, the battle of fear and trust, walking with God even when the way seems dark, thankfulness for God’s care, devotion to the word of God, and confidence in the eventual triumph of God’s purposes in the world. From tearful laments to triumphant thanksgivings, these expressions of emotion serve as patterns to shape the emotions and actions of the godly of every age. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 935–941, or visit www.esvbible.org.)

Placing It in the Larger Story

Throughout history, God has been fashioning a people for himself who will love and obey him, and who will express and nourish their corporate life in gathered worship. The Psalms (or Psalter) served as a vehicle for the prayers and praise of God's people in Israel, and Christians of all races today, who have been grafted into the olive tree of God's ancient people (Rom. 11:17, 24), can join their voices together with Israel in their worship. Put simply, the Psalter is our songbook for worship as well (see Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). There are indeed adjustments to be made, now that Jesus has died and risen—e.g., we do not offer bulls as “burnt offerings” (Ps. 51:19)—and yet Gentile believers in Jesus may rejoice with the people of God of all ages.

Key Verse

“Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!” (Ps. 150:6)

Date and Historical Background

The individual psalms come from diverse periods of Israel's history: from the time of Moses (15th or 13th century BC), to that of David and Solomon (10th century), down to exilic and postexilic times (e.g., Psalm 137).

One hundred and sixteen of the psalms have titles. According to those titles, David is the most common author: he appears in 73 titles, and the New Testament adds two more (Acts 4:25 for Psalm 2; and Heb. 4:7 for Psalm 95). Other authors include the Sons of Korah (11 psalms), Asaph (12 psalms), Solomon (possibly two psalms), and Moses (one). Other psalms do not identify the author at all. For a number of David's psalms we are given the context for the penning of a particular psalm (e.g., Psalm 3 was written after David fled from and then battled Absalom, see 2 Sam. 15–17). However, the historical context of most of the psalms is unknown or vague, which allows for an elastic application to every reader at all times everywhere.

Outline

The standard Hebrew text divides the Psalms into five “books,” perhaps in imitation of the five books of the Pentateuch (first five books of the Bible). The psalm that ends each book finishes with a doxology, and Psalm 150 as a whole is the conclusion both of Book 5 and the entire Psalter.

Book 1 (Psalms 1–41)

Psalms 1–2 have no titles that attribute authorship (but see Acts 4:25 for Psalm 2); they provide an introduction to the Psalms as a whole. The remainder of Book 1 is made up almost entirely of psalms of David: only Psalm 10 (but see note on Psalm 9) and Psalm 33 lack a Davidic superscription. Prayers issuing from a situation of distress dominate, punctuated by statements of confidence in the God who alone can save (e.g., 9; 11; 16; 18), striking the note that concludes the book (40–41). Reflections on ethics and worship with integrity are found in Psalms 1, 14–15, 19, 24, and 26.

Book 2 (Psalms 42–72)

Book 2 introduces the first Korah collection (42–49, although 43 lacks a superscription), with a single Asaph psalm at Psalm 50. A further Davidic collection is found in Psalms 51–65 and 68–69, including the bulk of the “historical” superscriptions (51–52; 54; 56–57; 59–60; 63). Once again, lament and distress dominate the content of these prayers, which now also include a communal voice (e.g., Psalm 44; compare Psalms 67; 68). The lone psalm attributed to Solomon concludes Book 2 with the Psalms’ pinnacle of royal theology (72; compare 45).

Book 3 (Psalms 73–89)

The tone darkens further in Book 3. The opening Psalm 73 starkly questions the justice of God before seeing light in God’s presence; that light has almost escaped the psalmist in Psalm 88, the bleakest of all the psalms. Book 2 ended with the high point of royal aspirations; Book 3 concludes in Psalm 89 with these expectations badly threatened. Sharp rays of hope occasionally pierce the darkness (e.g., Psalms 75; 85; 87). The brief third book contains most of the psalms of Asaph (Psalms 73–83), as well as another set of Korah psalms (Psalms 84–85; 87–88).

Book 4 (Psalms 90–106)

Psalm 90 opens the fourth book of the Psalms. It may be seen as the first response to the problems raised by the third book (Psalms 73–89). Psalm 90, attributed to Moses, reminds the worshiper that God was active on Israel’s behalf long before David. This theme is taken up in Psalms 103–106, which summarize God’s dealings with his people before any kings reigned. In between there is a group of psalms (93–100), many characterized by the refrain “The LORD reigns.” This truth refutes the doubts of Psalm 89.

Book 5 (Psalms 107–150)

The structure of Book 5 reflects the closing petition of Book 4 in 106:47. It declares that God does answer prayer (Psalm 107) and con-

WEEK 1: OVERVIEW

cludes with five Hallelujah psalms (146–150). In between there are several psalms affirming the validity of the promises to David (Psalms 110; 132; 144), two collections of Davidic psalms (108–110; 138–145); the longest psalm, celebrating the value of the law (Psalm 119); and 15 “psalms of ascent” for use by pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem (Psalms 120–134).

As You Get Started . . .

As mentioned above, the Psalms are divided into five “books.” Read the final verses of each of the five books (Ps. 41:13; 72:18–20; 89:52; 106:48; 150:6). What do these verses tell you about the overall theme of the book of Psalms?

The Psalms cover a great variety of poetic forms or types—laments, hymns of praise, hymns of thanksgiving, hymns celebrating God’s law, wisdom psalms, songs of confidence, historical psalms, and prophetic hymns. Read the brief definition of the psalm types.³ Then read Psalms 1, 19, 103, and 135 and identify their type.

The church father Athanasius called the book of Psalms “an epitome of the whole Scriptures,” and the Protestant Reformer Martin Luther called it “a little Bible, and the summary of the Old Testament.” Spend a few minutes skimming

the Psalms and making a list of Old Testament characters, stories, and themes found there.

Jesus taught us to read our Bibles with him in mind—“everything written about *me* in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44). “The Psalms” or “the Writings,” that section of the Jewish canon which starts with the book of Psalms, bears witness to Jesus (John 5:39) and so can “make [us] *wise* for salvation” (2 Tim. 3:15). The Psalms are quoted by the New Testament authors more than any other Old Testament book. When Paul quotes from the Old Testament, one-fifth of his citations are from the Psalms. And in Paul’s sermons in Acts, he often quotes from the Psalms. Look at his Acts 13:16–41 sermon. Note especially verses 33 and 35. Which two psalms does he quote? Then ask yourself, based on those psalms, what does Paul affirm about Jesus?

Take a few minutes to ask God to bless you with increased understanding and a transformed heart and life as you begin this study of the Psalms.

Definitions

¹ **The Psalms** – Our English title, “The Psalms” comes from the Greek word *psalms*, which is a translation of the Hebrew word *mizmor* (a word related to a verb meaning “to play a stringed instrument”). The traditional Hebrew name for the book is *tehillim* (“praises”), which is related to the word “hallelujah” (that is, “praise Yahweh”).

² **Selah** – There are several Hebrew words and phrases in the Psalms, such as “Selah” (e.g., 3:2, and 68 other times), “The Sheminith” (Psalm 6 title), “Shiggaion” (Psalm 7 title), whose exact meaning is uncertain. They are probably terms for musical or liturgical direction, and in some cases may be names of tunes or styles of chants.

³ **Psalm types** – While we cannot know with complete accuracy the ancient categories for the psalms, the basic types of psalms can be summarized as laments (presenting a troubled situation to the Lord), hymns of praise (calling believers to admire God’s attributes), and hymns of thanksgiving (thanking God for an answered prayer). There are also hymns celebrating God’s law (speaking of the wonders of the written Word), wisdom psalms (exploring themes found in the books of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes), songs of confidence (enabling worshipers to deepen their trust in God through difficult circumstances), historical psalms (recounting and celebrating God’s acts in history), and prophetic hymns (echoing themes found in the Prophets, especially calling God’s people to covenant faithfulness).

WEEK 2: DOORWAY TO THE PSALMS

Psalms 1–18



The Place of the Passage

Psalms 1–2 are the “doorway to the Psalms” in that they open the Psalter by introducing two of its primary themes: submitting to God’s word and God’s king. As we enter into Israel’s songbook, songs that were originally sung at the temple¹ are applied to every individual (“blessed is the man”; Ps. 1:1) for his own personal prayers and contemplations (on the Lord’s law “he meditates day and night”; Ps. 1:2).

The Big Picture

The first 18 Psalms take us on a journey through a full range of emotions and topics related to them, concluding fittingly with personal praise for what God has done and will do: “I love you, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn² of my salvation, my stronghold” (Ps. 18:1–2). (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 942–960, or visit www.esvbible.org.)

Reflection and Discussion

Read through the entire text for this study, Psalms 1–18. Then interact with the following questions and record your notes on them concerning this section of the Psalms.

Don't overlook the obvious. The Psalms are poems. Thus, they all employ beautiful imagery and voice great emotion. They also are structured in a certain way. In Hebrew poetry the most distinctive and pervasive organizing form of poetic art is parallelism. The three principal kinds are synonymous, antithetic, and synthetic. In a *synonymous* parallel the second half-line is identical or similar to the first. In an *antithetic* parallel the second half-line is opposite the first. In a *synthetic* parallel the second half-line imitates but also adds to the first. All three forms carry forward the thought of the first. Look at Psalms 3:1; 7:10; and 18:27. These are three examples of the three types of parallelisms—synonymous (echoes), antithetic (contrasts), and synthetic (completes). From the three verses above, which verse represents what type?

Read Genesis 12:1–3 and 2 Samuel 7:12–16. How do these two promises relate to Psalm 2? Then, read Acts 13:33, Romans 1:4, and Hebrews 1:5. What is said of Jesus in relation to these promises?

For the first (it won't be the last!) time in the Psalms, “foes” and “enemies” are mentioned in Psalm 3. Look at the superscription for Psalm 3. How does learning that David was the author, and that this psalm was tied to the occasion of Absalom's rebellion (2 Samuel 15–16), help you better understand the strong

language and blunt and seemingly brutal requests? (For further help on this topic, see the *ESV Study Bible*, page 938.)

The superscription for Psalm 3 is the first in the Psalter. The superscription in Psalm 4 is the first psalm to add “to the choirmaster” as well as “with stringed instruments.” Other psalms will say “to the choir” and list various other instruments besides the human voice, such as “for the flutes” (Psalm 5; compare Ps. 150:3–5). Tune names are also sometimes given, such as “According to the Sheminith” (Psalm 6) or “According to the Doe of the Dawn” (Psalm 22). What do such titles teach you about the nature and use of the Psalms?

As we shall see in our study of the Psalms, the Psalms are quoted more than 70 times in the New Testament. The apostle Paul quotes Psalm 4:4 in Ephesians 4:26. How does he apply it?

Psalm 5 is the first psalm to call God “King” (v. 2). This is the most pervasive metaphor for God in the Psalms: he is the God who rules the whole of creation. This psalm also provides the first instance of a psalm with prayers for the personal downfall of enemies. What does the psalmist ask God to do? Why?

WEEK 2: DOORWAY TO THE PSALMS

Psalm 6:1 is a good example of a parallelism. What different words mean nearly the same thing? How does the second line move beyond the first?

The early church labeled Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143 the “Penitential Psalms.” Psalm 6 is the first of these psalms. While we don’t know the specific sin or sins he sorrows over, what does the psalmist ask God to do for him?

Poetry uses imagery; what are the images employed in Psalms 6:6–7 and 7:1–2? Why does God use so many metaphors, similes, etc., in the Psalms? More specifically, how does such imagery aid the forming and expressing of ideas?

Psalm 8 is a “hymn of praise.” Notice that God is not praised for abstract attributes, but rather for what?

The Psalms teach us about God as well as about ourselves. What is said of “man” (human beings) in Psalm 8? How does the New Testament—namely

1 Corinthians 15:25–27; Ephesians 1:22; and Hebrews 2:6–9—apply this Psalm to Jesus? Compare also Psalm 8:2 with what Jesus said in Matthew 21:16.

In light of Romans 3 (phrases like “None is righteous, no, not one; . . . for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”; vv. 10, 23), when the psalmist asserts his innocence it may come across as self-righteous and presumptuous. Such claims are made in a few psalms in this section, including Psalms 4:1; 6:1; 7:3–5, 8; 17:1–5; and 18:20–24. Look at those psalms for a context in which to set those claims. What is the situation? How does that change the way you read phrases like “my righteousness” or “my feet have not slipped”? And, more generally, is it proper to make such claims of innocence? If so, when?

The Greek and Latin versions of Psalms 9–10 have these psalms combined as a single psalm, in part because, together, they follow a basically acrostic³ pattern. Moreover, there are thematic similarities. What do the two psalms have in common? How are they different?

Psalm 9 serves as an excellent summary of Psalms 1–18: that the Lord is a king who righteously saves those who trust in him by judging the nations who do not. From Psalms 9–18, a group called “the wicked” (also called “sinners,” “scoffers,” “wrongdoers,” “ungodly,” etc.) rises to the surface. For example, look at Psalm 10. Why does the psalmist ask God to arise and judge the wicked? What have the wicked done?

WEEK 2: DOORWAY TO THE PSALMS

Psalm 10 begins with a question we all ask at times: “Why, O LORD, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” Look at Matthew 26:53; 27:43; Luke 23:14–16; and 1 Peter 2:23. How did Jesus wait for God’s answer to this question? How does he serve as a model for you?

How is the question in Psalm 15:1 (asked twice, as a parallelism) answered in the rest of the psalm? Does anything make you uncomfortable about the answers? How does Hebrews 12 give a New Testament perspective on this?

There is a popular Christian slogan that “God loves the sinner but hates the sin.” What do you make of that slogan in light of Psalm 11:5?

It would be fascinating to do a study on all the questions asked in the Psalms! A common question (asked more than 20 times in the Psalms), starts “How long?” In Psalm 13, “How long?” is repeated four times. What helps the psalmist wait? Can what helped him, also help you?

Psalm 18 is an adaption of David’s song in 2 Samuel 22. In Romans 1:3 Paul writes of Jesus as “descended from David according to the flesh.” Similarly, Mary sings of her Son as being given “the throne of his father David” and having an everlasting kingdom (Luke 1:31–33). Jesus fulfills the Davidic covenant (read 2 Samuel 7). Where in Psalm 18 is this covenant talked about? Also, where is another place in the New Testament (there are many!) where Jesus is called “the Son of David”?

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for you.

Gospel Glimpses

SALVATION. When the Psalms (e.g., Ps. 3:1, 6, 7) speak of salvation from enemies, they prefigure our salvation through Christ from the ultimate evils of Satan, sin, and death (Heb. 2:14–15). By means of the resurrection (Acts 3:13–15), God the Father delivered Jesus from his enemies, and that is the basis of our deliverance (Rom. 4:25). As sinners (“there is none who does good”; Ps. 14:1), we cannot stand before a holy God—“evil may not dwell with you” (Ps. 5:4). Christ’s perfect holiness alone allows us to come into God’s presence (Heb. 10:19–22).

BLESSING THE RIGHTEOUS. God’s commitment to bless the righteous, as seen throughout the Psalms (e.g., Ps. 1:1), is supremely shown when he blesses Jesus, the perfectly righteous man, by raising him from the dead (Phil. 2:10–11). The blessings of Psalms are therefore for all Christians as well.

YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. Paul rightly uses Psalm 5:9 in Romans 3:13 as part of his argument that both Jews and Gentiles are under the power of sin. The two previous verses from Psalm 5 speak of how the genuinely godly recognize that they come before God only through “the abundance of your steadfast love” (v. 7) and “your righteousness” (v. 8), and thus they pray that God will “lead” them to walk in the “way” that is morally “straight” (v. 8). The righteous recognize that the only way to walk in righteousness is through the power of God.

Whole-Bible Connections

ANOINTED. Samuel anointed both Saul (1 Sam. 10:1) and David (16:13), setting them apart to be king. The king’s task was to rule Israel and to embody covenant faithfulness. God used David and other Israelite kings to protect his people against enemies. The word “Messiah” comes from transliterating the Hebrew word for “Anointed,” and the word “Christ” comes from translating “Anointed” into Greek. Israel’s anointed kings prefigure Jesus Christ, who is enthroned after his resurrection (Acts 13:33), now rules over all the nations (Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:21) on behalf of his people (Eph. 1:20–22), and will one day judge those who reject his rule. Salvation or judgment depends on one’s relation to this anointed Son (Ps. 2:7, 12; 18:50; John 3:36).

DOMINION. Psalm 8:6 sings of man’s “dominion over the works” of God’s creation. In Genesis 1:28–30, God gave Adam dominion over the garden of Eden. Yet, due to his disobedience, Adam’s and his posterity’s dominion was diminished (Rom. 5:12–21). Through Jesus’ resurrection and ascension (Heb. 2:5–9), he entered into dominion over the world (see 1 Cor. 15:42–49; Eph. 1:22).

HOPE OF EVERLASTING JOY. As in Psalms 49:15 and 73:24–26, Psalm 16:9–11 is a clear affirmation that the human yearning to be near to God and to know the pleasure of his welcome forever, beyond the death of the body, finds its answer in the covenant. Peter cites Psalm 16:8–11 in his Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:25–28), applying the verses to the resurrection of Jesus; Paul uses Psalm 16:10 in his thematically similar sermon (Acts 13:35). If the apostles meant that David’s words were only a prediction of the death and resurrection of Jesus, it is difficult to know what function the psalm could have played in ancient Israel: the congregation would have scratched their heads in puzzlement every time they sang it. However, the puzzlement goes away if the psalm is seen as cultivating the hope of everlasting glory, with the resurrection of Jesus (the “holy one” par excellence) as the first step in bringing this hope to fruition (see Rom. 8:23).

THE NATIONS’ PRAISE. After Psalms 3–17, Psalm 18 describes God’s rescue for the righteous. The imagery here is awesome (e.g., “He bowed the heavens and came down; thick darkness was under his feet. He rode on a cherub and flew; he came swiftly on the wings of the wind”; vv. 9–10). The action culminates in God’s anointed king praising God among the nations (vv. 49–50). The “nations” (i.e., Gentiles) are mentioned throughout Psalms 1–18, often as those who have rejected and revolted against God and his ways—“Why do the nations rage?” (Ps. 2:1; compare Psalm 9). However, Paul employs Psalm 18:49 in Romans 15:9 as a part of his proof that it was always God’s plan that the Gentiles should receive the light, especially through the Davidic line (Ps. 18:50; compare 2 Sam. 7:12–16), of which Jesus is the ultimate heir. The nations now belong to Jesus (Ps. 2:8; compare Gen. 12:1–3), and so they sing his praises (Ps. 18:43, 49).

Theological Soundings

RIGHTEOUS. This term can be defined in various ways depending on the context. In some contexts, “righteousness” is seen as one of God’s distinctive attributes, the quality of being morally right and without sin. In that connection, the Son of God displayed righteousness throughout his earthly life, and we are only righteous when God imputes the righteousness of Jesus Christ to those who trust in him. However, the term “righteous” in the Psalms usually refers more generally to those who are innocent of a specific sin or in contrast to certain sinners (their oppressors). Moreover, the righteous are the humble who voice their troubles to God in total dependence on his assistance.

RIGHTEOUS JUDGE. God is “a righteous judge” (Ps. 7:11), to whom all the peoples of mankind, and not only Israel, are accountable (vv. 7, 8); thus his “anger” (v. 6) and “indignation” (v. 11) are directed against those who threaten his faithful ones (the “righteous,” v. 9; and the “upright in heart,” v. 10). In English usage the word “judge” tends to focus more on condemning than on rescuing; in the Psalms, however, judging is usually a saving action—God intervening on behalf of the innocent and oppressed. The particular salvation or deliverance, then, is part of God’s larger project of putting the whole world back in right order (v. 9).

THE LORD. The covenant name for God—LORD (Yahweh)—was given specifically to Israel, but it is “majestic . . . in all the earth” (Ps. 8:1). This name is mentioned 698 times in the Psalms. The psalms are LORD-centered, monotheistic songs! That is, they praise the one true Creator,⁴ the maker of heaven and earth and ruler of all things. In the Psalms, Yahweh alone (no other gods) speaks, acts, sees, hears, and answers.

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Psalms 1–18 for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

WEEK 2: DOORWAY TO THE PSALMS

2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

4. Psalms 1–18

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord’s blessing and help as you continue in this study of the Psalms. Take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on a few key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight and underline these things to review again in the future.

Definitions

¹ **Temple** – There are many names for the temple used in the Psalms (house, tent, sanctuary, etc.). In the Old Testament, the temple is the place where God “sits enthroned” (Ps. 9:11; 22:3; 1 Sam. 4:4) as king forever especially over his people.

² **Horn** – The horn, as in “the horn of my salvation” (Ps. 18:2) or “lift up your horn” (Ps. 75:4), is a symbol of power and strength derived from the image of the horns of an animal, such as the wild ox (see 1 Kings 22:11; Zech. 1:18–21). God’s “horn” symbolizes his anointed king through whom he asserts his power.

³ **Acrostic** – A regular sequence of letters from an alphabet used to form a literary composition. Thus, for a psalm with an acrostic pattern, each line or stanza (as in Psalms 9–10) might begin with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

⁴ **Creator** – The Lord, the covenant God of Israel, is the creator and owner of all. He is the one who “founded” the world (Ps. 24:2; compare Gen. 1:1–2:3).

WEEK 3: LOVE THE LORD, ALL YOU HIS SAINTS

Psalms 19–31



The Place of the Passage

The book of Psalms is a “collection of collections” of poetic prayers. Psalms 19–31 demonstrate the great diversity of forms and themes found in the Psalter, such as private and public petitions and praises, laments, and doxologies.

The Big Picture

As Psalm 18 began with an exclamation of “love” (“I love you, O LORD, my strength”; v. 1), so Psalm 31 ends, “Love the LORD, all you his saints!”; v. 23). The Lord is to be loved because the Lord alone can save (e.g., Psalms 9; 11; 16; 18). (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 960–975 or visit www.esvbible.org.)

Reflection and Discussion

Read through the entire text for this study, Psalms 19–31. Then interact with the following questions concerning this section of the Psalms and record your notes on them.



Look at what is said about the written Word of God in Psalm 19:7–11. What synonyms are used for it? Find the verb “is” (also “are”). What “is” the Word?

Psalms 20–21 are “royal psalms” because they are concerned with the Davidic monarchy as the vehicle of blessing for the people of God. Psalm 20 is a prayer and Psalm 21 is a thanksgiving; both relate to the Messiah, the ultimate heir of David. How so? What pattern in these psalms was fulfilled in the life of Jesus?

In our previous lesson we encountered a “hymn of praise” (Psalm 8). Psalm 22 is the emotional opposite. It is a lament—a poem where a psalmist lays his troubled situation before the Lord, asking him for help. (As much as a third of the Psalter consists of laments.) In Psalm 22, how does David ask God to help? Why? In the passion narrative, Matthew’s Gospel presents Jesus as a thoroughly innocent and faithful man who is brutally and unjustly executed.

Read Matthew 27:35–46 and fill in the chart below, showing where Matthew’s account refers back to the verses listed here from Psalm 22:

Psalm 22	Matthew 27
Psalm 22:18	
Psalm 22:7	
Psalm 22:8	
Psalm 22:1	

Psalm 23 is a “psalm of confidence.” David praises God for his presence, provision, and protection. What images does he use for each of those divine actions?

Based on the creation pattern of Genesis 1, certain psalms were assigned to each day of the week for temple worship. For example, Psalm 93 was sung on the sixth day and Psalm 92 on the seventh. With Genesis 1 as your guide, what day do you think Psalm 24 was assigned to, and why?

Psalm 25 is a lament, structured in an acrostic pattern. However, it doesn’t end in the confident way most laments do, and it includes penitential elements. What does David ask God to do for him?

WEEK 3: LOVE THE LORD, ALL YOU HIS SAINTS

In Psalms 25–26, we again hear the language of personal integrity and innocence (e.g., Ps. 25:21 and nearly every verse of Psalm 26). How do such claims fit with petitions for forgiveness (“For your name’s sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great”; Ps. 25:11), pleas for redemption (“Redeem¹ me, and be gracious to me”; Ps. 26:11b), and temple worship (“altar” and “house”; Ps. 26:6–8)?

Although some of the psalms are didactic (instructional), overall the Psalter is not a catechism but a doxological confession of faith. As such, we *see* what genuine faith looks like. In Psalm 27, what is the picture of faith? In Psalm 29, what is the picture of praise?

In the Psalms, theology is taught indirectly and implicitly and often through imagery. In some psalms God is depicted as a king, warrior, judge, father, and even a protective mother bird. What image is used for God in Psalm 28? What does that teach you?

A “hymn of thanksgiving” is a psalm that thanks God for his answer to a petition. Some of these psalms are communal (e.g., Psalm 9) while others are individual, such as Psalm 30. What does Psalm 30 thank God for?

Psalm 31 is a lament that seeks help from God for a faithful person worn out with trouble and beset by “enemies” who want to do him harm (vv. 4, 8, 11, 13, 15, 18, 20). Sometimes it is difficult to connect such psalms directly to our lives. However, the psalmist’s trust transcends time. How does he exhibit personal faith in God? How did Jesus do the same (Luke 23:46)?

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for you.

Gospel Glimpses

LAW. The “law of the LORD” referenced in Psalm 1:2 and Psalm 19:7 speaks of the Torah—God’s covenant instruction through Moses. Although some may use the law as a means of self-promotion, that is not what Psalm 19:12–14 teaches. Instead, meditation on the law should lead us to reflect on our own sins, known and unknown; to rely on God’s forgiveness (justification²); and to seek God’s protection from sin’s dominion (sanctification³).

GOOD SHEPHERD. Psalm 23 begins “the LORD is my shepherd.” In the Gospel of John, Jesus calls himself “the good shepherd” (John 10:11–18, 27–29). As the good shepherd, Jesus embodies God’s care for his people, including the ultimate act of care—laying down his life for his sheep. Like the psalmist of Psalm 22, Jesus suffered physical, emotional, and spiritual pains. These sacrificial sufferings on our behalf brought salvation for us and adoration to him (Heb. 2:10–12).

Whole-Bible Connections

SINGING WITH JESUS. By expressing the emotional heights and depths in human response to God, the Psalms provide a permanent treasure for God’s people to use for expressing their needs and praises, both corporately and individually. As the representative man, Christ experienced our human con-