

Psalms 1-5 – Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

The Psalms have been treasured by the people of God for centuries.

This is the hymnbook of both Israel & the early Church.

The Psalms are poems that are set to music.

The word *psalm* comes means “a sung poem.”

But the music varies from age to age & place to place – so that the people of God can worship & praise Him in a culturally-relevant way.

Both poetry & music move the soul on a deep level.

Sung poems have the capacity to stir us, as well as to give us a way to express ourselves in a way the spoken word does not.

So for generations, God’s people have taken these words that are inspired by the Holy Spirit & are wonderfully insightful expressions of emotion –

Then set them to music that’s contemporary to their era & sense of the aesthetic; of what’s beautiful or moving.

That’s why we have words but no music here in the Psalms.

The Psalms are meant to be written in to the new musical forms of each generation.

The poetry of the Psalms is in a standard Middle Eastern form in which the poetic sense is conveyed by **thoughts** rather than **sounds**.

In English, poetry is all about **rhyme & rhythm**.

The words that end a line have the same sound.

The number of syllables in each line is the same so that a pattern is built.

*A flea and a fly in a flue
Were caught, so what could they do?
Said the fly, "Let us flee."
"Let us fly," said the flea.
So they flew through a flaw in the flue.*

The poetic sense in Hebrew was conveyed, not by sound but by thought.

You **repeated** something by using different words.

You added more description to it.

You’d describe something from one perspective, then mentally turn it and describe the same thing from that side.

We’ll see that clearly in Psalm 1

Another way to convey the poetic sense was to contrast one idea to another.

We see this a lot in Proverbs.

The wise man listens to counsel while the fool is one who shuts his ears.

So as we make our way through Psalms, look for the poetry here by looking for how an idea is rolled out by the author.

There are 150 Psalms and they were divided into 5 books, each book probably being 1 scroll.

These 5 scrolls were smaller than the other books of the OT – so they were easier to carry & could be used as a hymnbook.

Think of them as a kind of ancient iPod.

You’d take a Psalm scroll to a quiet place, sit down, unroll it & sing.

David wrote most of the Psalms.

The rest were written by priests who led worship in the temple.

Solomon wrote a couple, Moses wrote one.

A few others were written by one-hit wonders – just like today there are bands & single musicians who have only one hit that makes it to the Top 10 on the radio.

While most of the hymns convey praise & adoration to God, some are thanksgiving, a few are laments, expressions of a heart that is overwhelmed.

It’s the honest, sometimes brutally so, expression of emotion that has so endeared the hearts of God’s people to the psalms over the years.

Some psalms are just prayerful meditations on a walk with God, as in Psalm 1.

Psalm 1

¹ Blessed *is* the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; ² But his delight *is* in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night. ³ He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.

This psalm tells us ***how to be blessed***. WHO WANTS TO BE BLESSED?

Who wants to be ***successful***? // Really – it’s the same thing.

Often the word ‘blessed’ is interpreted as ‘happy.’

That’s fine but only if by ‘happy’ we mean ***satisfied, complete, settled, & confident***.

To be blessed means you’ve discovered where you came from, why you’re here, and know where you’re going.

You know God created you – that you’re here to know, love & serve Him, and that you’re going to Heaven.

But we live in a world that does everything it can to cover all that up.

It works constantly to muddy the waters & distract us from the truth.

So the Psalms open with a meditation on the 2 routes we can take – the world’s or God’s.

2 kinds of people confront us here - the godly & the ungodly, the saint & the sinner.

First we see the godly person.

He/she is described by some things they DON’T do.

We live in a fallen world influenced at every turn by the devil.

It’s filled with traps and snares.

While there’s much in nature & life to enjoy & celebrate, the ***system*** is designed to trap & destroy us.

Picture a man standing in the middle of a mine-field.

He’s ***good*** when he doesn’t walk through it haphazardly.

He’s ***safe*** when he doesn’t stand on top of a mine.

This world is a ***moral*** mine-field. So blessed is the one who lives ***carefully***, taking time to look around & ***consider his steps***.

Did you notice the ***progression*** into evil in v. 1?

There are 3 actions here: ***walking, standing, & sitting***.

Walking is daily life; the general way we go about things.

Standing speaks of someone who’s ***taken a position***; they’re now ***standing*** their ground.

As when at the *Diet of Worms* being tried for heresy, Martin Luther told the court that he was moved by his conscience & the Word of God to believe what he did, then said, “Here I stand – I can do no other.”

Sitting is the posture of one who’s ***settled down*** & now identifies themselves a certain way.

It’s no longer just about what they do, it’s who they are.

Sin is insidious because of the way it creeps into our lives & then takes over.

It usually begins in some small, subtle way.

The alcoholic doesn’t begin by drinking an entire 5th.

It’s recreational drinking at first, then becomes a whole 6-pak, then the hard stuff.

The drug addict starts by taking a hit off a passed around joint.

Then he starts buying his own – and is soon looking for a higher high.

The lure of lust is similar. It starts off with mild stuff but get’s nastier until it’s a hideous domination.

Being blessed ***begins*** by not ***walking*** in the ***counsel of the ungodly***.

We need to exercise care in ***who*** we listen to & whose ***authority*** we allow to control us.

Christian - Whose ***counsel*** shapes your life?

In both big & small decisions, what wisdom-base do you draw from?

Do you order your life after the counsel of the ungodly - those who do not consider God or care about Him?

Consider this –

If you’re single > Who’s told you HOW to live as a single?

If you’re married > Who’s wisdom shapes your marriage & your role as a husband or wife?

Your parents? TV?

If you're a parent > Who's wisdom informs the raising of your children?

Don't take your guidance in life from the ungodly, from those who don't consider God.

Because if you do, if you make a choice to follow the world rather than God, then soon you will take a stand with the enemies of God.

You'll become one of those who sees clearly what God says, & because it doesn't agree with what you want, you'll bend it to fit your desires.

These are the people who say it's cool to smoke weed.

They say it's fine to get drunk.

That sex outside of marriage is fine. // That homosexuality is chill.

Once someone does this, it's not long until they take a seat among the scornful, among those who deny & reject God altogether.

You see, while they're standing in the path of sinners, the Holy Spirit is still convicting them that they're in the wrong place.

That's a tough place to be because they're surrounded by **the lost**, by people who are urging them away from God.

So, in the desire to gain acceptance by the world, they shut off the conviction of the Spirit and embrace unbelief.

Blessed is the one who doesn't **begin** this digression into wickedness.

Instead, his **delight** is in the law of the Lord, & in His law he meditates day & night.

This one takes his/her counsel from God - from His Word!

The blessed person, walks, stands, and rests in the revelation of God.

Does v. 2 describe you?

When it comes to the word of God, are you more like a butterfly, botanist, or honeybee?

The **butterfly** flits from bloom to bloom, barely resting before it takes off again; it quickly takes a little taste, then flies away.

The **botanist** comes with his magnifying glass & notebook & plant manuals; he studies & inspects - he reads & records.

Then after being very impressed, departs.

The **honeybee** lands on the flower, works its way right down into the heart of it & gathers as much sweetness as it can hold & flies away full - returning to the hive where it **shares** what it's gleaned with its companions.

The blessed one **delights** in the law of the Lord & **meditates** in it day & night.

He's like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.

The one with their roots deep into God & His Word has what they need to succeed.

A few years ago, the *Associated Press* released a study done by an agricultural school in Iowa.

It reported that production of 100 bushels of corn from one acre of land, in addition to the many hours of the farmer's labor -

Required 4 million lbs of water, 6,800 lbs of oxygen,
5,200 lbs of carbon, 160 lbs of nitrogen, 125 lbs of potassium,
75 lbs of sulphur, & other elements too numerous to list.

In addition to these, rain & sunshine at the right time are critical.

It was estimated only 5% of the produce of a farm can be attributed to the direct efforts of man.

V. 3 reminds us that fruitfulness in life doesn't come from self-effort; it comes from abiding in the Word of God day and night

The Word is the soil & water of spiritual health & fruitfulness.

⁴ The ungodly *are* not so, But *are* like the chaff which the wind drives away.

In contrast to the lush greenness of the Word-rich godly is the dry, brownness of the Word-poor worldly.

⁵ Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. ⁶ For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the ungodly shall perish.

A day of judgment is coming - a day when all will stand before the Righteous Judge of heaven and Earth.

The books will be opened. And everyone not written in the Book of Life will be swept away

Want To Be Blessed?

Then exercise care in who you listen to & live by.

Immerse yourself in the Word of God – read & study it, then ask the Spirit to install it in your daily life.

The November 24th, 1986 issue of *Newsweek* ran the story of *Roy Whetstine* who purchased a rock from an amateur rock collector at an Arizona mineral show for \$10,000.

Roy was a student of geology & knew the piece was worth more than the selling price, so he was glad to pay it, though it was a lot of money.

He immediately took it to have it assessed.

It was valued at \$2¼ million & declared to be the world's ***largest sapphire***.

This is a precious gem of far greater value than Whetstine's sapphire, but some of us are like that amateur collector - we don't know its real worth.

We fail to avail ourselves of the joy such wealth could bring.

We leave it lying wherever it happened to be the last time we brought it home from church.

This is our own personal gold mine, just waiting to be mined. Let's dig in!

Psalm 2

¹ Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing?

In Acts 4, this Psalm is mentioned as written by David & prophetic of Jesus.

Basically, it's a song of praise for God being sovereign.

His Kingdom will come & His will, will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.

The godless may rage & howl but they cannot stop God from doing what He wills.

² The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the Lord and against His Anointed, [Messiah] *saying*, ³ "Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us." While this has been the attitude of most human governments throughout history, it will reach its climax in the policy of the last global government led by the antichrist.

⁴ He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision.

How foolish for man to think he can defeat God! What a laughable proposition.

⁵ Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, And distress them in His deep displeasure:

The Book of Revelation describes for us what the wrath of God will look like in those days.

Here's what God will say to these fools -

⁶ "Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion." ⁷ "I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. ⁸ Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations *for* Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth *for* Your possession. ⁹ You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.' "

The antichrist & all his supporters will unite to install their plan for global domination, thinking they can somehow Keep Jesus from coming back & taking possession of what rightly belongs to Him because of the cross. But all their plans & machinations won't work.

Jesus will come, defeat them and take His throne, ruling in righteousness over the Earth.

The scepter of His rule will be swift & totally righteous judgment.

When someone is found guilty, the punishment will be swift & without appeal – because there's no appealing perfect judgment!

¹⁰ Now therefore, be wise, O kings; Be instructed, you judges of the earth. ¹¹ Serve the Lord with fear, And rejoice with trembling. ¹² Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, And you perish *in* the way, When His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed *are* all those who put their trust in Him.

Since God IS sovereign over history, there's really only one wise course – submit to God & serve Him – and not just from a distance. Get as close to Him as possible.

What's interesting about this Psalm is how it promises to the Messiah much of what the devil offered Jesus in the second temptation in wilderness.

Psalm 3

¹ A Psalm of David When He Fled from Absalom His Son.

Absalom staged a rebellion against his dad the king that gained popular support & removed David from the

throne until the people realized they made a huge mistake.

This Psalm gives us a clue as to what David was thinking & feeling as he had to make his escape from his own son.

Lord, how they have increased who trouble me! Many *are* they who rise up against me. ² Many *are* they who say of me, “*There is no help for him in God.*” Selah

It was a crushing realization that so many people would turn on him so quickly.

This turn of events had to move David to reconsider what **kind** of a king he’d been recently.

That’s no doubt what the ‘selah,’ is for.

We find this word at several points in the Psalms.

We’re not sure exactly what “selah” means but many scholars think it’s an instruction to the musician to provide a short musical interlude without singing.

It provided a time of reflection for what had just been said.

And indeed, David did need to think about all this.

What decisions had he made that had led to such a sorry state of affairs?

As you read the story leading up to Absalom’s rebellion, you realize that David had made some **grave errors** in judgment.

Listen, no one is perfect; we all make mistakes.

Wise is the man or woman who turns defeats into lessons & takes instruction from their mistakes.

³ But You, O Lord, *are* a shield for me, My glory and the One who lifts up my head.

V. 2 makes it clear that the sitch for David wasn’t good.

Strategically, he was outnumbered & out-maneuvered.

But David was used to that as his lesson with Goliath revealed.

His defense was unseen & He had every confidence that when all was said & done, he’d be the victor.

⁴ I cried to the Lord with my voice, And He heard me from His holy hill. Selah

Another moment to meditate.

Though David is on the run, he’s taken his need to the only One who can really help.

He knows his help will come, so he keeps doing what he needs to till it does.

And so it is for us!

God is your defense. God is your supply. God is your help.

Lift up your voice to Him, then wait for it.

And while you wait, keep doing what you need to.

⁵ I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the Lord sustained me.

When someone is in David’s position, it’s difficult to sleep.

Anxiety is the dream thief.

But David was at peace because of his faith in God so he could lie down and sleep.

⁶ I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people Who have set *themselves* against me all around. ⁷ Arise, O Lord; Save me, O my God! For You have struck all my enemies on the cheekbone; You have broken the teeth of the ungodly.

David asks for help in the coming conflict & bases his request in the faith that past protection & provision by God has given him.

⁸ Salvation *belongs* to the Lord. Your blessing *is* upon Your people. Selah

Remember that to the Jews, salvation was much more than a spiritual deliverance from judgment & hell.

It meant to be completely restored to wholeness, health, prosperity and all that is good.

Such salvation belongs to God - & **only** to Him.

Psalm 4

¹ To the Chief Musician. With Stringed Instruments. A Psalm of David.

This psalm was probably written during the same period as Psalm 3 though it expresses a slightly different emotion on David’s part.

If Psalm 3 is a confident expression of faith in God’s deliverance, this Psalm is a call David makes to himself to man-up & do the right thing.

Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have relieved me in *my* distress; Have mercy on me, and

hear my prayer. ² How long, O you sons of men, *Will you turn* my glory to shame? *How long* will you love worthlessness *And* seek falsehood? Selah

David knows that he's God choice to rule Israel.

He knows that Absalom & his supporters are rebelling not just against him but against God.

So he challenges them to wise up.

How could they be so self-deceived?

But asking that question, David has to turn it on himself – is HE deceived?

The way to know is to focus on what is true. So -

³ But know that the Lord has set apart for Himself him who is godly; The Lord will hear when I call to Him. ⁴ Be angry, and do not sin. Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still. Selah

David's big mistake would be to start asking, "Is God on my side?"

The question ought to be – "Am I on God's side?"

SO David calls himself to think it through.

Is his anger selfish or righteous?

And are his actions dictated by anger or by his faith in the Lord?

Be angry – and do not sin. [Preach – anger is real; what we do with it is what's important.

Jesus in Temple, in winepress]

⁵ Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, [right sacrifices – those done with the right spirit] And put your trust in the Lord. ⁶ *There are* many who say, "Who will show us *any* good?"

In other words – "What good is it to pray?"

Lord, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us. ⁷ You have put gladness in my heart, More than in the season that their grain and wine increased. ⁸ I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; For You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.

Though this was a brutal trial he was going through, he had absolute confidence in God.

Psalm 5

¹ To the Chief Musician. With Flutes. A Psalm of David.

The previous Psalm was to be accompanied with stringed instruments.

This one was played with flutes.

Give ear to my words, O Lord, Consider my meditation. ² Give heed to the voice of my cry, My King and my God, For to You I will pray. ³ My voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord; In the morning I will direct *it* to You, And I will look up.

Something's on David's mind; some pressing need that dominates his prayer.

It's the first thing he thinks about when he awakes and immediately takes it to God.

He asks God to take special note of it.

⁴ For You *are* not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness, Nor shall evil dwell with You. ⁵ The boastful shall not stand in Your sight; You hate all workers of iniquity. ⁶ You shall destroy those who speak falsehood; The Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.

Those are strong words.

David says God ***hates, abhors***, and will ***wipe out*** sinners.

How do we square that with John 3:16?

We've often heard it said that God hates sin but loves sinners.

So, how do we deal with what David says here?

There are a couple things I need to make clear.

First – in the Jewish mind, evil isn't just some abstract idea; it isn't a cosmic force that floats around the universe.

Evil is attached to the ***will*** of a person.

If it weren't for ***choice***, there'd ***be*** no evil.

It's ***persons***, whether angelic or human, who ***do*** evil.

Second – the evil-doers mentioned here are the same as the ***scoffers in Psalm 1*** & the ones who've taken a ***determined & unchanging stand against God in Psalm 2.***

These are people who are **beyond** redemption – who've given themselves over to evil & won't repent & be saved.

Because they've aligned so completely with evil – they bear the brunt of God's hatred of evil.

Also, God's hatred & abhorrence of evil here isn't so much **emotional** as it describes His posture toward it, how HE acts in its regard.

He's against it; totally opposed to it!

That David speaks of the wicked this was right after asking God to listen closely to his prayer means that he's struggle with evil people.

They're giving him a hard time & David wants God to take note.

Listen – this is a great model for our prayer too.

When you're being harassed by the devil, when spiritual warfare is thick and evil abounds, ask God to take note of it and show His active opposition to it.

⁷ But as for me, I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy; In fear of You I will worship toward Your holy temple.

The word temple here means the tabernacle.

It would be some years before Solomon would build the temple.

Unlike the evildoers of vs. 4-6, David loves & serves God.

⁸ Lead me, O Lord, in Your righteousness because of my enemies; Make Your way straight before my face. This is such a great request!

The enemies of God watch the faithful carefully – hoping they will fall so they can pounce.

So David asks for grace to walk before the Lord in a way that brings honor to Him, not shame.

⁹ For *there is* no faithfulness in their mouth; Their inward part *is* destruction; Their throat *is* an open tomb; They flatter with their tongue.

The speech of the wicked is altogether corrupt, and boy is that true!

Once you discover a scoffer, a mocker, a cynical unbeliever who's been turned over to sin, don't trust a thing they say; specially when they compliment you.

It's deceitful flattery that only lies like a thin rug over a trap.

¹⁰ Pronounce them guilty, O God! Let them fall by their own counsels; Cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions, For they have rebelled against You.

This is an oft repeated prayer of David's – that the wicked would get caught in their own traps.

Like Haman was hanged on his own gallows.

¹¹ But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; See the poetry? This contrasts with the previous verse.

Then as we go on in v. 11, we add more to the faithful -

Let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them;

Sometimes, our praise ought to be loud!

Let those also who love Your name Be joyful in You. ¹² For You, O Lord, will bless the righteous; With favor You will surround him as *with* a shield.