



DESERT VIEW BIBLE CHURCH

PSALMS: THE SONGBOOK OF THE BIBLE PSALM 103:1-14;

PSALM 23 •

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MAIN POINT

The Book of Psalms is an amazing collection of songs that enable us to praise, worship, lament, remember God's faithfulness, and give expression to our thoughts and prayers.

INTRODUCTION

List a few of your favorite songs. What makes these particular songs so moving and memorable?

Now consider Scripture. Which verses from the Bible stick out to you as some of the most touching? Why?

Certain songs, poems, and even movies hold special places in people's hearts because of the ways in which we connect with the stories being told. Consider your favorite songs. Does the narrative connect with an experience from your past? Do the lyrics help you put words to the feelings you have about life, love, etc.? The same is true of Scripture—and the Psalms in particular—but to a far greater degree. All of the Psalms focus on God, His power and His love for His people, and all of the Psalms are useful for teaching us how to talk to and think about God.

UNDERSTANDING

READ PSALM 37:3, 42:3, 116:1, 33:1, AND 55:4.

What emotions are represented in these verses?

What life circumstances prompt these emotions in you?

Some of us have fallen into the trap of believing that the Psalms are mostly the same, but as we see in these verses the Psalms cover a wide gamut of emotions and each Psalm has its own distinct function. We have Psalms of prayer and thanksgiving, in which we learn how to praise God for who He is and express gratitude for what He has done. We also have Psalms of lament, which teach us to honestly express our lowest lows. The Psalms help us express a range of emotions, thoughts, and prayers.

READ PSALM 103:1-14.

What characteristics of God are represented in these verses?

How would you describe the theme of this Psalm?

As George Guthrie notes, “the Psalms help us reflect on God and life.” This passage in particular is a great example of this truth. The theme of the passage is forgiveness, and each of its verses gives us insights into the forgiving nature of God. In each of the Psalms we are given glimpses of who God is and what He has done, His righteous character, and His mighty acts. We see that God is holy and forgiving. He is our healer and redeemer. He is faithful, compassionate, righteous, just, gracious, slow to anger, and loving. In George Guthrie’s words, “When we understand the purpose of a Psalm and what it teaches us about God, we are ready to ask ourselves how we should respond.”

READ PSALM 23.

What message is the psalmist trying to convey with his word pictures?

What word pictures from this Psalm do you most closely identify with at this point in your life?

The psalmists use poetic word pictures and figurative language in order to express strong emotions. When we read the Psalms, we must take time to absorb the metaphors and savor the beautiful language. As we meditate on the figurative language of the Psalms we will begin to understand how the emotions of the psalmists parallel our own lives.

In what ways does Psalm 23 parallel your own emotions and experiences with God?

READ PSALM 123.

What was the main thing the psalmist was asking God for?

The Hebrew word translated as “favor” means to show compassion, or to be gracious toward. What is an area of your life in which you need God’s favor?

There are many different kinds of Psalms (i.e. historical, thanksgiving, praise, confession, lament, etc.). Psalm 123 is a Psalm of petition, in which the psalmist calls out to God and asks Him for favor. This Psalm serves as one example of how we can incorporate the Psalms into our prayers and daily lives. Using the words and images of Psalm 123, we can pray and ask God to show us favor in our lives.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How do you feel about freely expressing your emotions to God as the psalmists did?

In Psalm 23 David described ways God is the Good Shepherd. How have you experienced God as the Good Shepherd in your life?

Of the verses from the Psalms that we’ve covered today, which ones best express you current spiritual state? Explain.

PRAYER

Take time with God to confess your current doubts, fears, and frustrations with the same openness, vulnerability, and trust we see from the psalmists. Thank God for hearing you out and walking you through every emotion and experience that life hands you.

COMMENTARY

PSALM 37:3

37:3 God's covenant promise to His people was that they would dwell in the land... securely if they obeyed His commands. "The land" is significant in this psalm as the "inheritance" of those who were loyal to Yahweh (37:9,11,22,29,34).

PSALM 42:3

42:3 The profusion of tears from crying is pictured as drenching furniture in 6:6. In this context they were the psalmist's only food. This hyperbolic expression shows the depths of his grief (80:5).

PSALM 116:1

116:1 "Love" (Hb 'ahav) here implies love associated with a covenantal relationship. The concept is used in ancient Near Eastern covenants between the victorious and the vanquished. Compare 119:47-48,97,113; Dt 6:5; 11:1; 13:3, all of which restrict the use of "love" to a disciple's love for God's word and will.

PSALM 33:1

33:1-3 This is a typical beginning for a descriptive praise psalm, which has the two main elements: a call to praise (vv. 1-3) and a cause for praise (vv. 4-22). The relationship between the beginning of this psalm and the end of Psalm 32 is evident in the use of righteous ones and upright. Since there is no title to this psalm, the connection is even more pronounced. Even though only the lyre and harp are mentioned, they probably represent all the musical instruments used for worship. A new song might be one newly composed for a special occasion or it might mean a new experience of God's acts through the singing of this psalm. Worship in Israel often involved "entering into history" in order to experience events as if they were happening at that moment.

PSALM 103:1-14

103:1-2 The threefold repetition of praise represents the highest form of worship (Isa 6:3). The Hebrew word translated benefits (gemul, from gamal) means paying back what is deserved (28:4; 94:2; 116:12; 142:7). It most often describes God's divine wrath and retribution toward the enemy (Isa 59:18), but here it describes the Lord's blessings enumerated in verses 3-5.

103:3 Forgives (Hb soleach), a cultic expression common in Leviticus and Numbers, finds fuller development in Isa 33:24; 43:25, although only Isa 55:7 includes the expressed condition of repentance. God heals Israel physically and spiritually, yet we should not associate all physical distress with sin. The Lord heals both body and spirit through forgiveness, providing a sense of wholeness (147:3; Isa 53:5).

103:4-5 The word redeems denotes the payment of a ransom price. The Israelite redeemed his firstborn (Ex 13:1-16). The family redeemer exacted revenge for wrongful death of a near relative, and he adopted the responsibility of raising a son to carry on a dead brother's lineage (Dt 19:1-13; 25:5-10; Ru 3:8-9). Pit refers to Sheol, the place of the dead. The people of God are adorned with covenant loyalty and mercy, like a wreath of honor or esteem presented to a dignitary or king. These

verses convey a sense of divine providence and peace, so that youthful strength is renewed (lit “renews itself”) like an eagle (Isa 40:31; 57:10).

103:6-7 Righteousness and justice toward the poor and needy in society reflect the ethical integrity of the king as God’s representative. The Lord’s revealing His ways to Moses refers to the divine formula describing God’s character (Ex 34:6-7). God demonstrated His compassion through His mighty works of victory and the sustenance of His people in the wilderness.

103:8-9 In this allusion to Ex 34:6-7, the psalmist used the divine formula as the basis on which Israel experienced the Lord’s forgiveness (cp. Isa 57:16 for parallel expressions and terms).

103:10 While God’s holiness demands payment for sin, God’s mercy and compassion restrain His discipline. The Hebrew word *gamal*, rendered repaid, forms a wordplay with verse 2. The Lord’s people enjoy His “benefits” (*gemul*) because He does not pay them back (*gamal*) for their sins.

103:11-12 The extent of the Lord’s covenant loyalty is incomprehensible, and His capacity for removing transgression is immeasurable. Once the Lord forgives sin it no longer exists (Isa 43:25), and the sinner is delivered from the Pit (Isa 38:17). The language alludes to Isa 55:6-9.

103:13 A godly father disciplines his child not out of malice, but because he loves him (Heb 12:3-13). The Lord demonstrates mercy and compassion toward His children through forgiveness of sin and blessing, in spite of their weaknesses.

103:14 The Hebrew word *yetser* (what we are made of; “our formation”) comes from the verb *yatsar*, which denotes the shaping of clay by a craftsman into an acceptable vessel. God’s intimate knowledge of His created beings affirms their origin and frailty.

PSALM 23

23:1 The Lord is often referred to as the shepherd of His people, Israel (74:1; 80:1; Isa. 40:11; Ezek. 34:11-16). In the ancient Near East, kings were commonly known as the

shepherds of their people. Since Yahweh is the true King, the title “shepherd” is most appropriate.

23:2-3 “Let me lie down” is a Hebrew form implying causality, showing that God is the cause of the refreshment. “Right paths” might have a twofold idea. In keeping with the shepherd and sheep image, it can mean safe paths that are free from danger. In the larger context of Wisdom literature it refers to paths of righteousness, though usually that would contrast one path of life with another leading to death. The former idea is probably the primary meaning here.

23:4 Some argue that the Hebrew term “tsalmaweth” is related to an Akkadian word (tselem) that means “deep darkness.” Others say it comes from two Hebrew words, “tsal” and “moth,” and means “shadow of death.” It occurs approximately 20 times in the Old Testament. It is clear that it implies intense darkness that represents extreme danger (Job 10:21; 28:3; Jer. 2:6). “Darkest” fits this specific context, since it is in the darkest valley where the greatest danger (such as a predator) lurks for sheep.

23:5 The image shifts from shepherd to friend. The identification of Yahweh with a shepherd emphasizes His care and protection, but He is much more than that for a person who is in close fellowship with Him. While protection from enemies is still implied, it is intensified with the image of a banquet (table) that is served while the enemies look on. In Jewish society oil was a symbol for rejoicing (104:15) and was also used in the welcoming of guests (45:7; 92:10; Luke 7:46).

23:6 The verb “pursue” is commonly used for attackers, but here Yahweh’s goodness and faithful love are personified as the ones who chased the psalmist throughout his life. “As long as I live” represents the Hebrew “for the length of days.” This is equivalent to the parallel “all the days of my life.” Though some translate this as “forever,” it is nowhere else used that way but always refers to one’s earthly life (91:16; Prov. 3:2,16). “Dwell” is similar to the word for “return.” In this verbal form, it differs only in the vowels. It is possible that the request is to return to the sanctuary of Yahweh throughout one’s life, although the preposition in argues for the idea of “dwell.”