

PSALMS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

A Twelve-Week Berean In-Depth Study

Welcome

The Psalms were Israel's songbook and Israel's prayer book. For a thousand years these were the words God's people put in their mouths when they were glad, when they were frightened, when they had sinned, when they had been wronged, and when they had nothing left to say for themselves. Shepherds sang them. Kings wrote them. Pilgrims sang them on the road up to Jerusalem, and the priests sang them in the courts when the pilgrims arrived. And when the apostles began to preach that a crucified carpenter from Nazareth was the Lord and Christ of God, the book they reached for more than any other book in their Bible was the book of Psalms.

That is worth stopping over. A great many people carry a quiet assumption that the Bible was headed one direction, and then Jesus arrived and started something else. The apostles never thought that way. They did not treat Jesus as an interruption in Israel's story. They treated Him as its point. The hopes Israel sang about, the promises God swore to David, the patterns God built into kings and priests and sacrifices and temples, and even the very words Israel used in worship, all of it was reaching toward Him. Peter stood up at Pentecost and preached the resurrection out of Psalm 16. The church in Jerusalem prayed Psalm 2 over the men who had crucified the Lord. The writer of Hebrews built his whole case for the Son out of a chain of psalms. They did not have to force these songs to speak of Christ. They read them out loud and pointed.

Our aim over the next twelve weeks is not information, as worthy as information would be. Our aim is transformation. Paul says that we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, "are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Corinthians 3:18). That is what happens to people who look long at Jesus. So we are not gathering twelve interesting Hebrew poems to admire. We are looking at Christ through the windows His own people sang through, and asking God to change us while we look.

How this study is organized

Each lesson follows the same simple pattern. You can expect:

A short introduction that sets the historical and spiritual scene, tells you what the psalm is about, and tells you what to read during the week. Read this first, with your Bible open beside you.

Light commentary on the psalm and on the New Testament passages, embedded in the lesson itself, that points out interesting words, important phrases, historical background, and connections to the rest of Scripture. These paragraphs are meant to help you observe and interpret more carefully, not to replace your own thinking.

Numbered questions that walk you through the Scripture. Some questions are observational (what does the text say?), some are interpretive (what does it mean?), and some are personal (what does this have to do with my life?). Write your answers in the space provided. There is no grade and no wrong answer, only the answer you actually arrive at.

Sidebar callouts in four flavors:

Study Skill: A short lesson on a habit of careful Bible study. Topics will include reading a psalm in its original setting; recognizing Hebrew parallelism; watching how a New Testament writer quotes the Old Testament; following a cross-reference chain; telling the difference between a prophecy and a type; letting Scripture interpret Scripture; noticing a superscription; doing a word study; and reading a quotation back in its own context. Skills you learn here will serve you in every Bible study you ever do.

For Further Study: Cross-references and rabbit trails for those who want to dig deeper into a doctrinal point, a theme, or a parallel passage. These can be done on your own during the week or used to extend the group conversation.

For Thought and Discussion: Open-ended questions for reflection or for group conversation, questions that may not have one right answer but are worth wrestling with.

Optional Application: Concrete, sometimes costly, suggestions for putting the passage into practice this week.

A "Your response" section at the end of the lesson, where you write down what God seems to be saying to you personally through His word, what you intend to do about it, and what you would like the class to pray for you.

A "For the group" section with a warm-up question, discussion suggestions, and a wrap-up to guide your time together.

The four questions we ask each week

Every lesson in this study works through four movements. They are not labeled in the lessons, but they are always there, and knowing them ahead of time will help you.

First, what did this psalm mean in its original setting? Who wrote it, on what occasion, and what would the first singers have understood by it?

Second, how does the New Testament use it? We will read the actual passages where the apostles and the Gospel writers quote the psalm, and we will watch what they do with it.

Third, what does that use teach us about Jesus?

Fourth, how should that truth shape our faith and our conduct?

The first question matters more than most people expect, and it is the one most often skipped. It is tempting to treat the psalms as coded predictions, sealed messages that lay meaningless on the page for a thousand years until Jesus came along and broke the code. That is not what they are. Psalm 2 was sung by real people about a real king on a real hill. Psalm 22 came out of the throat of a man in genuine anguish long before Golgotha. Psalm 95 was a call to worship that Israel actually used. God was preparing something in each of them that neither the poet nor the first singers could yet see whole, but the songs were true and meaningful the day they were written. A psalm that never meant anything to Israel cannot mean the right thing to us. So we will do the historical work first, every week, and we will find that it makes the New Testament use richer rather than thinner.

A word about prophecy and pattern

When we hear that Jesus "fulfilled" an Old Testament passage, most of us picture a prediction coming true, and sometimes that is exactly right. Micah named the town of Bethlehem centuries before Mary went there. That is direct prophecy: a statement that could only ever have found its target in the Christ.

But the New Testament uses the idea of fulfillment more broadly than that. To fulfill often means to fill up, to bring a pattern to completion. This is what we call typology. God shaped Israel's history and Israel's worship so that certain figures kept recurring, and then He sent His Son to be the full and final form of what those figures had only sketched. Jesus does not merely match a sentence somebody wrote. He fills the whole shape.

Watch for five of these patterns as we go. David was an anointed king; Jesus is the Anointed King. David suffered unjustly at the hands of men who hated him without cause; Jesus is the perfectly righteous sufferer. Israel was called God's son and failed in the wilderness; Jesus is the faithful Son who did not fail. Man was made to rule creation and lost the crown; Jesus is the true Man, crowned with glory and honor. Israel had priests in one family and kings in another, and the two offices were never allowed to meet; Jesus unites both in Himself, a priest upon His throne.

Get in the habit of asking which kind of connection you are looking at, direct prophecy or pattern, and be willing to answer "both." Several of these psalms work both ways at once. Being able to tell the difference will keep you from overclaiming where the text does not support it, and it will keep you from missing a real fulfillment when the New Testament puts one right in front of you.

How to use this study

You will get the most out of these lessons if you plan to spend about thirty minutes a day, four or five days a week, working through the questions slowly. Resist the temptation to do all the questions in one sitting the night before class. The Lord tends to do His best work in us through His word when we give it time to speak, and not when we cram.

Bring your Bible. Almost every question is rooted in the Scripture for the week. Any sound translation will work. The quotations in these lessons follow the ESV, and the NKJV, NASB, ASV, CSB, and NIV are all useful companions for this study. If you have access to two translations, even better. Comparing

translations is itself an important Bible study skill, and it will matter more in this series than in most, because the New Testament writers often quote the Greek Old Testament rather than the Hebrew, and you will see the difference with your own eyes.

Bring a pen. Underline. Star. Circle. Argue in the margins. The page is yours.

And bring an honest heart. The Psalms are the most honest book in the Bible. Men wrote in them that God had forgotten them, that the wicked were winning, that their bones were wasting away, that they were sinking in deep waters where there was no foothold. God put those words in His own hymnbook. He can handle yours too.

A note for the group leader

Each lesson closes with a "For the group" section offering a warm-up question, suggestions for which questions are most important to discuss, and a wrap-up. Most lessons contain more questions than a group can cover in a single hour, and that is on purpose. The questions are first for personal study during the week; the group hour is for sharing what God has shown each person and for working through a smaller number of questions together. A Leader's Guide accompanies every lesson, with goals for the session, notes on the sensitive topics the lesson is likely to raise, a suggested schedule, substantive answer notes on the key questions, and a suggested closing prayer. Trust the class to come prepared, and trust the Lord to direct the conversation through His word (Hebrews 4:12).

A word about the One we are really studying

Though this study is about twelve psalms, it is really about Jesus. On the evening of the resurrection He opened the Scriptures to His disciples and told them plainly where He had been all along: "everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44). He named the Psalms. He said they were about Him. Every week we are going to take Him at His word and go looking.

By the end of these weeks, the goal is not that you would know more about Hebrew poetry, as good as that would be. The goal is that you would love Jesus more, look more like Him, and trust Him in the places where, just now, you are most afraid. He is reigning. He is interceding. And He is singing in the midst of the congregation, which means He is singing with us.

Welcome. Let us begin.