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Fellowship Church 2017-18 Bible Study

## MEETING GOD IN THE PSALMS

Psalms has long been a favorite part of Scripture for God’s people. It constitutes a prayer book, first for Old Testament Israel and then for the church. Many people have found words to express the longing of their hearts to God in the Psalms. In my own life and ministry there was a time when I was in such pain and distress, Psalms was the only book I could read in my daily devotions. There is comfort, wisdom, and a deeper relationship with God to be found in the Psalms. They teach us to:

- Worship God as Almighty Creator and Redeemer
- acknowledge his sovereign lordship in our lives
- Have confidence in his control over the world and history
- Give thanks for his faithfulness and mighty acts
- Pour our complaints before him
- Express our confident trust in his care.

The purpose of this study is to help you read and understand the Psalms as God’s holy Word to you, and to apply its message to your life. While we look at individual Psalms, we will also consider the nature of the Old Testament as Scripture—how it is applicable to Christians today. We will consider the structure and major themes of the Psalms. And we will learn an interpretive method for studying Psalms. All of this will have the ultimate goal in mind—to deepen our relationship with God.

### 1.0 THE OLD TESTAMENT AS SCRIPTURE

God is Lord over the creation and over mankind. His throne is established in the heavens and he reigns over the world. He has always reigned and will continue to reign forever (Psalms 47; 93; 96; 97; 98; 99). After God created the world and mankind (Gen 1-2), man rebelled. Sin and death entered the world (Gen 3). When Adam sinned, God began to implement his plan to re-establish his rule (or *kingdom*) on earth by providing redemption<sup>1</sup> for sinners. This is the overarching *theme* of the Bible—God’s redemption of mankind after the fall of Adam. The Bible reveals that God’s plan focuses on his Messiah (Christ).<sup>2</sup> In order to reestablish his kingdom, God sent his eternal Son to earth

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<sup>1</sup> Through Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden, all of mankind became enslaved to sin and death. This is known as the *fall* of man. *Redemption* refers to the act of God delivering us out of bondage from sin and death. This redemption was accomplished by Jesus giving his life as a payment to *redeem* us (purchase our freedom). God the Father accepted Jesus’ death as payment for our sin, seen in the fact that he raised him from the dead.

<sup>2</sup> The title *Messiah* (from the Hebrew word *māšîaḥ*) literally means “anointed one.” It became a title to refer to the kings of David’s dynasty (Ps 2:2; 18:51; 89:38, 51; 132:10, 17), especially the ultimate Davidic

to be born the Messiah of Israel. The Messiah's mission was to provide redemption for mankind and so to reestablish God's reign over the earth. The Old Testament (OT) is the record of God establishing a series of covenants in which he promised to send the Messiah. The New Testament (NT) is the record of the Messiah coming to earth, providing redemption, and reestablishing God's rule in fulfillment of the OT promises.

### 1.1 The Old Testament as the Self-Revelation of God

The OT was written in order to reveal God to us so that we might know him. God has revealed himself through his words and actions in Scripture. He invites us to hear the story of how he created the world and began to work his redemptive plan in history. By listening to his words we are able to view creation and history from his perspective. The OT shows us *who* the one true God is and *what* he is like. We see his power, holiness, covenant faithfulness, love and mercy in action. *What* he does reveals *who* he is. Because he reveals himself to us, we are able to know him more deeply. When we understand how God has worked in the past, we can also understand how he will work in the future. Seeing God act faithfully on behalf of his covenant people in the OT builds our confidence to believe that he will act faithfully on our behalf today. The OT teaches us that he is able and committed to see his plan of redemption through to completion.

### 1.2 The Covenant as the Unifying Theme of Revelation

The **Abrahamic Covenant** is at the center of God's revelation of himself in Scripture. In it he revealed the means by which he would provide redemption for the nations of the earth. Abraham's descendant, the Messiah, would be the one through whom redemption would come. God's covenant reveals his character. We see his unconditional mercy and grace in the promises of his covenant. We also see his holiness in action as he holds his people accountable to live godly lives.

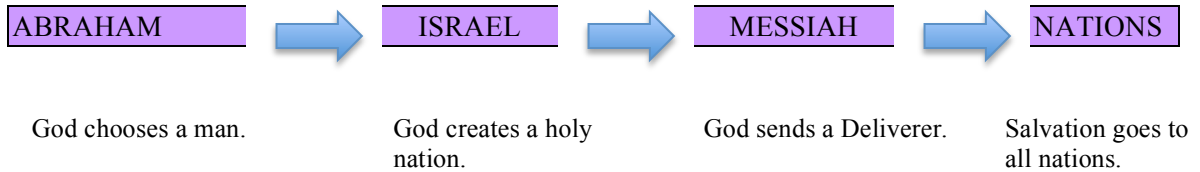
Genesis 12:1-7 presents the *call* of Abraham. Here God first stated his covenant promises. Genesis 15:1-21 records the *formalization* of the covenant. In Genesis 17:1-14 God stipulated the *sign* of the covenant (circumcision). God confirmed his covenant promises to Isaac (Gen 26:2-5) and Jacob (28:13-15).

The covenant introduced in Genesis 12 becomes the means of redemption for the nations worked out in the rest of Scripture. It looks like this: (1) God makes a covenant with Abraham. (2) A nation (Israel) comes from Abraham. (3) Abraham's descendant (Messiah) comes from Israel. (4) Through Messiah, blessing (redemption) will come to all nations.

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King that God had promised in his covenant with David (2 Sam 7:12-13), the coming Messianic Prince (Dan 9:25). The equivalent title in Greek is *Christos*, from which we get the title *Christ*.

*Abrahamic Covenant*



**Three additional covenants** enlarge aspects of the Abrahamic covenant.

1. **Mosaic covenant—a code of conduct to show Israel how to live distinctively as God’s covenant people.**

The books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy reveal and explain the Mosaic Covenant (the Law), a code of conduct designed to regulate the life of God’s chosen people under the covenant. The book of Joshua records God’s faithfulness in giving the land of Canaan to Israel in fulfillment of his covenant promise. Judges provides a record of Israel’s lack of faithfulness to the covenant, a theme that unfortunately reoccurs throughout the rest of the OT history.

2. **Davidic covenant—a dynasty of kings through whom Messiah will come.**

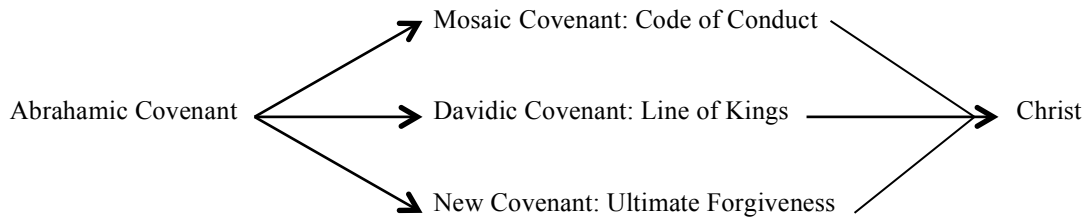
1 and 2 Samuel describe the institution of the monarchy in Israel. God chose Saul to be Israel’s first king, but Saul forfeited the kingship due to disobedience. God chose David, a man after his heart. When David became king, God made a covenant with him, the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:12-16). This provided for a dynasty of David’s descendants to rule as king. Eventually the Messiah would come from this dynasty and rule forever. After David’s son Solomon died (931/30 B.C.), the kingdom was divided when the ten northern tribes of Israel refused to submit to the Davidic king. The northern kingdom “Israel” was conquered by Assyria and ceased to exist as a kingdom in 722 B.C. The southern kingdom “Judah” was conquered by Babylon and taken to exile for seventy years beginning in 605/4 B.C. After the exile, while there were no longer Davidic kings reigning in Jerusalem, David’s line and God’s covenant would continue through Zerubbabel until the Messiah was born.

3. **New Covenant—through Messiah, God will forgive the sins of his people and write his Law on their hearts. His people will know him.**

Just before the exile, God announced the **New Covenant** through the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 31:31-34). The Messiah would establish this covenant through his death on the cross. The New Covenant promised that God would forgive the sins of his people, that he would write his Law on their hearts, and that his people would know him. Ezekiel adds that God’s Spirit would indwell his people (Ezek 36:27).

*All of these covenants work together as a consistent and unified whole.* The Abrahamic covenant contained the basic promise—the descendant of Abraham (Messiah) would provide the blessing of salvation to all the families of the earth. The Mosaic Covenant

regulated the life of Israel in preparation for his coming. The Davidic Covenant established that the Messiah would come through the line of Davidic kings and reign forever. The New Covenant provided for a real, internal experience of forgiveness and a relationship with God. Jesus the Messiah fulfilled all of these covenants.



### 1.3 The Authority of the Old Testament for Christians

Since the OT is part of God's scriptural self-revelation, it possesses divine authority. The NT states that all Scripture is *God-breathed*, that is, inspired by God (2 Tim 3:16). Paul states that the OT was written for our (NT Christians) instruction (Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:11). As God's Word, both the OT and NT carry the very authority of God himself and so is relevant to believers. This has several implications. (1) It means that all that the OT teaches is true. To disbelieve or reject any of the OT is to disbelieve or reject God. (2) It also means that we are responsible to understand what the biblical author (the human author, but ultimately God) wants us to understand. We are not free to take only what we want to hear from the OT and leave aside other parts. Nor are we free to read into Scripture what we want it to say. Nor may we be lazy in our approach to reading it. We must seek to understand what God desires to communicate to us. (3) Further, we are responsible to respond in faith and obedience (in the way that God intends) to all that the OT teaches. As Scripture, the OT still has authority over our lives, as those who live during the period of its fulfillment and follow Christ (Rom 8:4).

### 1.4 Interpreting the Old Testament

We must allow the OT text to speak for itself. We should be careful not to read *our own* presuppositions and worldview into the OT text. Rather we must seek to understand the thought of the biblical authors according to *their* presuppositions and worldview. Then we can appropriately understand and apply their message to our own world. We can properly understand the message of Scripture by:

1. Identifying the literary genre (type of literature) of the book (law, historical-theological narrative, psalms, proverbs, prophecy, and so on).
2. Understanding the original historical situation of the author and his readers (where possible).
3. Seeking to identify the purpose and message of the author.
4. Seeking to understand what the text is teaching us about God, about ourselves, and about the world around us.
5. Seeking to apply appropriately the overall message of Scripture understood in its

original context from our place in the history of salvation.

6. Understanding how the OT revelation applies to us as NT believers.

We should read each of the OT books with a view to discovering the overall intent of the author. That way we will be in a position to understand what God intends to say to us through the book. We should not read the OT merely as a source for devotional thoughts or illustrations for living. We need to understand the larger theological plan of God revealed in the individual books and in the OT as a whole.

## **2.0 OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK OF PSALMS<sup>3</sup>**

The book of Psalms is one of the most loved books in Scripture. Through the ages, believers have found comfort reading the Psalms. Key ideas include (1) the kingship and sovereignty of God; (2) the importance of praising God for his attributes and mighty deeds; (3) the importance of calling upon God in times of crisis; (4) God's comfort and defense of his people, and his judgment of the wicked; and (5) the reign of the Davidic king, ultimately the Messiah.

### **2.1 The Writing of the Book and Its Outline**

There are two aspects to the composition of the Psalms: (1) the writing of each individual psalm on a particular historical occasion; and (2) the collection of all 150 psalms into the book of Psalms as we now have it. The individual psalms were written over a period of nearly 1000 years, beginning with Moses (Ps 90) until the post-exilic period (Ps 137).

Our knowledge of the authorship of individual psalms comes from the psalm titles. The titles of one hundred of the psalms indicate an author. Of these, David wrote seventy-three; Asaph wrote twelve (Pss 50, 73-83); a group called the sons of Korah wrote eleven; Solomon wrote two (Ps 72, 127); Moses (Ps 90), Heman (Ps 88), and Ethan (Ps 89) wrote one each. Fourteen titles connect individual psalms written by David to specific incidents in his life that can be correlated to events recorded in 1-2 Samuel (Pss 3, 7, 18, 30, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, 142).

Later editors collected and arranged the psalms into groups.

David group 1	3-41
Sons of Korah group 1	42-49
David group 2	51-65
Asaph group	73-83

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<sup>3</sup> This overview is based largely on A. Hill and J. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*. Second Ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000).

Sons of Korah group 2	84-88 (except 86)
Congregational praise group	95-100
Hallelujah group 1	111-117
Songs of Ascent group	120-134
David group 3	138-145
Hallelujah group 2	146-150

Eventually, the psalms were divided into *five books* as follows:

### **Outline of the book of Psalms**

<b>Book I</b>	1-41
<b>Book II</b>	42-72
<b>Book III</b>	73-89
<b>Book IV</b>	90-106
<b>Book V</b>	107-150

## **2.2 Types of Psalms**

The psalms can be divided into categories according to their form and purpose:

1. **Lament Psalms.** These are psalms in which an individual or the community is in trouble, and they present their complaint to the Lord, asking him for deliverance. This is by far the largest category of Psalms—about 50 are laments. Many of David's psalms are *individual* laments (e.g. see Psalms 3-7, 13-14, 22). For examples of *community* laments, see Psalms 12, 44, 58, 60, 74, 79-80.
2. **Hymns of Praise.** These psalms call God's people to praise him for his excellent attributes and mighty deeds. They may focus on specific attributes of God (145), or on his works of creation (8), or on his kingship over creation (93). For other examples, see Psalms 29, 33, 46-48, 76, 84, 87, 95-100, 103-104, 111-113, 146-150.
3. **Hymns of Thanksgiving.** These psalms thank God for his specific answers to prayer. For examples of *individual* thanksgivings, see Psalm 9, 18, 30, 32, 34, 92, 116, 138. For examples of *community* thanksgivings, see Psalm 65, 107, 124.
4. **Songs of Trust.** In these psalms the worshiper expresses his trust in God in the midst of difficult circumstances. See Psalms 11, 16, 23, 27, 62-63, 91, 121, 125, 131.
5. **Wisdom Psalms.** These psalms focus on the themes of the wisdom books like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. See Psalms 1, 37, 49, 73, 112, 127-128, 133.
6. **Royal Psalms.** These psalms relate to the Davidic king and Davidic covenant, and ultimately to the Messiah. Some of these may fall into other categories as well, such

as thanksgiving (18, 21), hymn (89:1-37), or lament (89:38-51). See Psalms 2, 18, 20-21, 45, 72, 89, 110, 132, 144.

7. **Hymns celebrating the Law of God (Torah Psalms).** These psalms speak of the greatness of the Law of Moses. See Psalms 19:7-14; 119.

### 2.3 Purpose, Message, and Structure of the Book of Psalms

The purpose and message of the individual psalms depend on the type of psalm (see above). The book of Psalms as a whole was collected in order to provide Israel with a variety of songs for individual and corporate worship in various circumstances.

Many scholars suggest that Psalms 1 and 2 provide an introduction to the whole book of Psalms. Psalm 1 distinguishes between the righteous and wicked person, and affirms that the Lord will bless the righteous and judge the wicked. Then Psalm 2 presents the Davidic king God has chosen and affirms that God will defend him against enemy nations. So the book of Psalms opens with an encouragement to the individual Israelite to walk in righteousness and with the promise of God's loyalty to the king and nation. Ultimately, God's redemptive promise is fulfilled through the Messiah.

**Book I** (after the introductory Psalms 1 and 2) contains mostly psalms of David. These psalms largely contain prayers for deliverance from distress and expressions of confidence in God. The integrity of the worshipper in the midst of trouble is a major theme. Psalm 41, which closes this section, focuses on David's confidence in the Lord for deliverance and concludes with a blessing for the God of Israel.

**Book II** opens with a group of psalms from the sons of Korah, then includes another group of David's psalms. As with Book I, lament psalms (spoken out of situations of distress) dominate Book II. Psalm 72 (attributed to Solomon) closes this section by focusing on the Davidic king, asking God to prosper him. It concludes with a blessing for the Lord and a call for all the earth to be filled with his glory.

**Book III** opens with darkness and confusion, as the author of Psalm 73 describes how he questioned the justice of God because of the prosperity of the wicked (an issue many still struggle with today). Psalm 88 is the most despairing of the psalms. Yet some psalms in this section express hope (75, 85, 77). Psalm 89 closes Book III by recounting God's past faithfulness expressed in his covenant with David. Like Books I and II, Book III concludes with a blessing for the Lord, but not until the last section of Psalm 89 asks God where his steadfast love, as seen in the Davidic covenant, has gone.

**Book IV** answers Book III by opening with Psalm 90, the prayer of Moses. In contrast to the despair found in Book III, Psalm 90 recounts God's actions on behalf of Israel long before David. Psalms 93-100 declare that the Lord reigns! Psalms 103-106 are hymns of

praise that recount God’s faithfulness. Psalm 106 concludes Book IV with a blessing for the God of Israel and a call to all the people to praise the Lord.

**Book V** fulfills the call at the end of Book IV to praise the Lord. Psalm 107 begins by focusing on the steadfast love of the Lord. It repeats the refrain that God has consistently delivered his people when they have cried out to him. There are two collections of David psalms (108-110, 138-145), a group of Hallelujah (“Let us praise Yahweh”) hymns (111-117), a lengthy Psalm extolling the Law of Moses (119), and a collection of Songs of Ascent to be sung by pilgrims as they go up to Jerusalem (120-134). Book V closes with five more Hallelujah hymns (146-150). These provide a fitting conclusion to the entire Book of Psalms. They repeatedly call his people to praise the Lord. In this way, Book V points us to God’s faithfulness, his deliverance of his people, and his reign.

The final collecting of the Psalms by an editor into its present form was not completed until after the return from Babylon, or perhaps even as late as the second or first century B.C. The Psalms manuscripts found among the Dead Sea Scrolls (second century B.C.) contains Psalms in the identical order of our Old Testament in books I-III, but the order of Psalms in books IV-V varies from our present Old Testament. This may suggest that the final order of Psalms in books IV-V was not established until the second or first century B.C.

## 2.4 Major Themes in the Psalms

The theological instruction in the Psalms is rich. Among the more prominent themes, note these:

1. **The kingship and reign of God over creation and over his people.**  
God is the one true God, the maker of heaven and earth, and he reigns over all. His glorious attributes—power, might, wisdom, purity, steadfast love, and mercy—are on display for all to see. Creation declares the glory of God.
2. **God’s election of his people and faithfulness to his covenant promises.**  
God has proven faithful and will continue to prove faithful to his people. He has chosen his king (ultimately the Messiah) and he will save his people. All of Messiah’s enemies will be placed under his feet and he will reign forever.
3. **Believers’ Trust in God and integrity in suffering.**  
The righteous sufferer will trust in God in times of distress and call to him for deliverance. God will answer him. While God allows his people to suffer, they are headed for a glorious future.
4. **Praise and Thanksgiving.**  
God’s people are called to give praise to him at all times for his glorious attributes and his mighty actions. Further, they are called to give thanks when he answers their prayers.



## 5. Prophetic picture of the coming Messiah.

The Psalms point to the coming Davidic Messiah in at least two ways:

(1) First, the kings described in the *Royal Psalms* (2, 18, 20-21, 45, 72, 89, 110, 132, 144) foreshadow the ultimate King. David wrote Psalms 18, 20, 21, and 144 about his own experience with the Lord. But David, as the first in a line of kings promised in the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7), foreshadows the ultimate Davidic King. So these Psalms point beyond David to Jesus. Likewise, Psalm 72, written by Solomon, asks God to bless his reign. And Psalm 132 appeals to the Davidic Covenant in order to ask God to bless the Davidic king. Through foreshadowing, these become prayers for God to bless the reign of Messiah. The celebration of the Davidic king and his bride (Ps 45) and Ethan's meditation on the Davidic covenant (Ps 89) likewise anticipate the coming Messiah. Psalm 2 describes God's choice of the Davidic king and his commitment to uphold him. It warns the kings of the earth to submit. While it originally applied to the Davidic king at the time of composition, ultimately it refers to the Messiah. All of these psalms are prophetic, pointing to the coming Messiah through typology (foreshadowing). Psalm 110, written by David, is the only Psalm that prophesies directly of the Messiah.

(2) Second, the *Righteous Sufferer Psalms* (16, 22, 31, 34, 35, 41, 69) depict one who suffers unjustly at the hands of his enemies. David wrote each of these psalms *about his own suffering*. But in God's providence, the sufferings of David provided a pattern of righteous suffering that found its ultimate fulfillment in Christ. When the Gospel writers composed their narratives of Christ's passion, they included echoes of these Psalms. In this way they demonstrated that Jesus was the ultimate suffering Davidic King to whom David's sufferings pointed. Consider the use of these psalms in the Gospel passion narratives and Acts:

Psalm 22:1	Why have you forsaken me? (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34)
Psalm 22:7a	Mocked (Matt 27:29, 31, 41; Mark 15:20, 31; Luke 22:63; 23:11, 36)
Psalm 22:7b	Passersby hurl insults (Matt 27:39; Mark 15:29)
Psalm 22:18	Divide up garment and cast lots (Matt 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34; John 19:23-24)
Psalm 31:5a	Into your hands I commit my spirit (Luke 23:46)
Psalm 34:20b	Not one bone broken (John 19:36)
Psalm 35:19; 64:4	They hate me without reason (John 15:25)
Psalm 41:9b	He who shared bread lifted his heel (John 13:18)
Psalm 69:21	Wine mixed with gall; vinegar to drink (Matt 27:34, 48; Mark 15:23, 36; Luke 23:36; John 19:29)
Psalm 16:8-11	You will not abandon my soul to Hades (Acts 2:25-28)

## 3.0 Interpreting and Applying the Psalms

We only understand the text when we have obeyed it, when it has changed our lives. “All right knowledge of God is born of obedience.”<sup>4</sup> Once we understand what the Bible is saying, as followers of Christ we are obligated to apply it to our lives and to obey. This brings up the subject of applying Scripture. In this section we will focus on the devotional reading of Scripture and a method for legitimate application.

### 3.1 Devotional Reading and Study of the Psalms

The purpose of God’s Word is not merely to enlighten your mind; it is to nurture your soul. Scripture is not merely a source of correct doctrine; it is a source of spiritual nourishment.

As a deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.  
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? (Ps 42:1-2).

When we approach Scripture humbly, ready to hear from God, we should expect the Holy Spirit to speak to us and to guide us into truth for our lives. Our object is to allow God to be our master as he speaks through the text about our lives. We do not *ignore* the historical-grammatical meaning of the text. We allow God to speak to us about our lives *through* the historical-grammatical meaning of the text. We see ourselves in the text of Scripture and we receive what it says to us about ourselves (James 1:22-25).

One of the spiritual practices encouraged by the Bible itself is meditation. This is not the meditation of eastern religions, of emptying yourself or of becoming one with the divine. This is the spiritual discipline of filling your mind with a Scriptural text and pondering on its significance and application to your life. It is the practice of sitting quietly in the presence of God in an attitude of humility and worship, listening to God’s voice through the text of Scripture. Note how Scripture encourages meditation on God’s Word day and night:

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night (Josh 1:8).

But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night (Ps 1:2).

Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day (Ps 119:97; cf. vs. 15, 23, 48, 99, 148).

The regular devotional reading of Scripture is a tool used by the Holy Spirit to deepen your relationship with God and to make you more like Christ.

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<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1.6.2.

### 3.2 A Method for Devotionally Reading and Studying Individual Psalms

#### 1. Determine Who? What? Where? When? How? Why?

Ask these basic questions of the Psalm to determine who is speaking and what he is saying. Do your best to observe what is going on in each verse of the Psalm before you read any study aids.

Notice such things as: situation, mood, purpose, motive, cause and effect, attitudes, explanations, comparisons or contrasts between persons, and so on. What is the psalmist “doing” in the psalm (praising, thanking, complaining, questioning, describing, requesting, stating trust)? What does he say about God? About himself? About others?

#### 2. Are there historical or cultural background factors that contribute to understanding the Psalm?

Understanding the historical situation provides insight into the perspectives of the psalmist. Knowledge of OT language, worldview, life, and customs, revealed in the Law and the OT historical books, provides basic background for the Psalms. Try to bridge the “gap” between your worldview and the psalmist’s worldview. Use a commentary or other study aids to answer these questions. Some of David’s Psalms provide a note on the historical background for his writing.

#### 3. Consider the meaning of the words in the text and their grammatical relationships.

(a) Words. The most likely meaning of any word in a text is that which considers the use of the word in its *present context*. Most words have a *range of meanings* and can mean more than one thing. For example, in English, the word “trunk” can be used of the trunk of a tree, a car, or an elephant. It can also refer to Granny’s old storage container in the attic. Context shows you which meaning is appropriate. It is the same for OT words.

(b) Grammatical relationships between clauses and sentences. Noting the *relationship between clauses and sentences* is especially important for following the argument or flow of thought of an author. Usually *key words* indicate how clauses and sentences fit together. Below are examples of key words (noted in parentheses) that indicate a relationship between clauses and sentences:

- Time (when, after, before, until)  
    When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion (Ps 126:1)
- Place (where, on, above, under, beside, in)

- In the midst of the gods he holds judgment (Ps 82:1)
- Purpose/Result (so that, that, in order to, to)
  - That I may recount all your praises (Ps 9:14)
- Cause or reason (because, for)
  - My eyes shed streams of tears, because they have not kept your law (Ps 119:136).
- Explanation (for, now, indeed)
  - For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday (Ps 90:4)
- Comparison (like, as)
  - He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit (Ps 1:3)
- Contrast (but, nevertheless)
  - But you, O LORD, are on high forever (Ps 92:8)
- Condition (if, when, unless)
  - Unless the LORD builds the house (Ps 127:1)
- Concession (although, even though, even if)
  - We will not fear though the earth gives way (Ps 46:2)
- Conclusion (therefore, so then)
  - Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment (Ps 1:5)

Don't read your contemporary worldview, assumptions, use of language, and situation back into the text. Read the Psalm as if for the first time, attempting to put yourself into the historical situation in order to understand the meaning of the words expressed and their grammatical relationships. What is the "flow" of the psalmist's argument? Try to answer these questions considering the situation of the psalmist before moving to your own situation. After considering the meaning of the words in the original context, then you can apply the significance of the words to your situation.

#### 4. Are figures of speech present?

A figure of speech is a non-literal use of language to convey meaning and to heighten the effect of meaning, often by comparing one thing to another. Figures of speech are especially prevalent in the Psalms. For example, the word "bull" commonly refers to a four-legged animal. But in Psalm 22:12, when David complains that "strong bulls of Bashan" surround him, he is referring to his human foes. Psalm 91:4 refers to God's "feathers" and "wings." Since God does not literally have feathers or wings, the interpretive task is to understand what the author was saying about God by using the terms figuratively.

Here are some common figures of speech used in the Psalms.

- A *simile* states that one thing resembles another using the words "like" or "as."
  - He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit (Ps 1:3)
- A *metaphor* is the use of one thing to represent another ("like" or "as" does not occur).
  - The God of Jacob is our fortress (Ps 46:7)
  - The LORD is my shepherd (Ps 23:1)

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (Ps 119:105)

- A **metonymy** uses one noun or idea to represent another because the two are associated.
  - Pour out your wrath upon the nations (Psalm 79:6)  
The word “wrath” (the cause) represents judgment (the effect).
  - I love you, O LORD my strength (Psalm 18:1)  
The word “strength” (the effect) represents the One who strengthens (the cause).
  - Kiss the son (Ps 2:12)  
The verbal idea of “kiss” (the sign) represents the idea of submission or showing homage (the verbal idea signified).
  - May his enemies lick the dust (Ps 72:9)  
“Lick the dust” represents a state of humble prostration and defeat.
  
- A **synechdoche** exchanges one idea for a closely related idea, where the two ideas belong to the same genus (class). In metonymy above, the two related nouns need not belong to the same genus.
  - My flesh yearns for you (Ps 63:1)  
The word “flesh” represents the person (who has flesh).
  - That in the gates of the daughter of Zion I may rejoice in your salvation (Ps 9:14)  
The word “gates” represents the city of Jerusalem (with its gates).
  
- A **merism** expresses a totality by stating two contrasting parts.
  - You know when I lie down and when I get up (Ps 139:2)  
The opposites “lie down” and “get up” represent all activities.
  - If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there (Ps 139:8)  
The opposites “heaven” and “Sheol” represent all places—anywhere in creation.
  - You have made summer and winter (Ps 74:17)  
The opposites “summer” and “winter” represent all seasons.
  - From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the LORD is to be praised (Ps 113:3)  
These phrases represent the farthest east, farthest west, and everywhere in between.
  
- A **hendiadys** emphasizes an idea by using *two* terms to express *one* idea.
  - Let me hear joy and gladness (Ps 51:8)  
The two terms represent the same idea.
  - My soul shall be satisfied with fat and fatness (Ps 63:5)  
“Fat and fatness” represent the idea of fat and rich food.
  
- **Hyperbole** (exaggeration) emphasizes a point by saying more than is actually meant.
  - Every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with weeping (Ps 6:6)
  
- **Personification** portrays an inanimate object or abstract idea as though it has human qualities.
  - Your rod and your staff, they comfort me (Ps 23:4)

The rod and staff are presented as though they have human qualities (ability to comfort). They represent God's protection of his sheep.  
Lift up your heads, O Gates! (Ps 24:7)  
Gates are described as if they could lift up their heads.

- An **anthropomorphism** depicts God as though he has the form of a human.  
Your right hand and your arm, and the light of your face (Ps 44:3)  
Hide your face from my sins (Ps 51:9)  
Incline your ear to me (Ps 31:2)
- A **zoomorphism** depicts God as though he has the attributes of an animal.  
He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge (Ps 91:4)  
In the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy (Ps 63:7)

#### **5. Consider what the psalmist is *doing* with his words in the Psalm.**

Is he praising God for his attributes or actions? Thanking God? Making a request? Remembering his dangerous predicament that God rescued him from? Expressing confidence in God's sovereign care? Complaining? Denouncing his ungodly opponents? The Psalm will give you the opportunity to do the same as you consider your own situation.

#### **6. What seems to be the main point of the Psalm?**

Try to summarize this in one sentence.

#### **7. What theological points are evident in the Psalm?**

What does the Psalm teach you about God, Christ, man, sin, salvation, and so on? Does the theology of the Psalm agree with the rest of Scripture? Is there a theological problem present (something that you do not understand or that seems to conflict with other statements in Scripture) that requires further study?

#### **8. How are you to respond and apply the lesson of the Psalm?**

How does the Psalm instruct, affirm, exhort, rebuke, challenge, encourage, warn, or affect you any other way? What is God saying to you about your life? Does the Psalm give words to the expression of your heart? How can you apply this Psalm to your own relationship with God?

**4.0 Study Template**—Use the following template in your study of each Psalm.

