

Psalms Relating to David's Life

As we saw in an earlier lesson, the psalms make reference to historical events in which God has revealed, saved, and judged. Though Christians live under a new covenant, we worship the same God as did Israel. His nature or character has not changed. But, as we read the psalms, it is important to first look at God's character as seen in His historical dealings with Israel, because these psalms were written in the context of physical Israel, not the spiritual one (the church). Once whatever historical context available is gleaned, Christian readers are better positioned to make contemporary applications.

A number of the psalms are either by or about David. So, it will be valuable to study the biblical story about him, as revealed in 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles. For example, as demonstrated in our last lesson on Psalm 23, the fact that David served as a shepherd in his youth and as a shepherd-king in his adulthood, adds considerably to our understanding of that psalm.

We learn also in those historical books that David was both a musician and psalmist (1 Sam. 16:15-23;

2 Sam. 1:17-27; 22:1; 23:1-7). The latter passage speaks of "the oracles of David," implying he was also a prophet, which is confirmed in Acts 2:30. Thus, it will not be surprising when we find prophetic elements in some of the psalms.



In an earlier lesson we noted that there are questions about whether all of the seventy-three psalms inscribed as "A psalm of David" are to be viewed as written by David. However, it seems that some undoubtedly are his. For example, Psalm 110 almost certainly must be of Davidic origin because Jesus spoke of it as such. "For David himself said by the Holy Spirit: 'The LORD said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.' Therefore David himself calls Him 'Lord';

how is He then his Son?" (Mark 12:36-37).

Likewise, Peter's argument from Psalm 16, which he links with Psalm 110, also depends upon David being the author (Acts 13:33-37). In Romans 4:6-8 Paul quotes Psalm 32:1-2 as being from David, and the early church, praying, quoted David via Psalm 2 (Acts 4:25-26).

The great value in linking David's life to any psalms written by him or about him is that we can see, hear, and maybe feel the truths expressed coming alive in the life of a real person. David speaks, not theoretically, but in expression of his experience. When a Bible reader can relate faith, trust, obedience,

and hope to real life situations, it is invaluable in then making personal applications.

Since David so boldly expresses his feelings about so many things in his life which may parallel our own experiences, he shows us the right way even while being terribly honest about his feelings and failings.

Even when he writes of having done wrong, he shows us how to return to the right path—and righteousness.

Information in the Superscriptions

As we have noted briefly in an earlier lesson, some of the information in the superscriptions that precede many of the psalms doesn't make the authorship, point, or purpose of those psalms perfectly clear. Those headed "A psalm of David" may be written *by* David, or be written *about* David or *for* David. The Hebrew language would allow

for such a variation in the preposition.

But, other superscriptions or titles are “historical” in nature. Take for example Psalm 3, which is headed “A Psalm of David when he fled from Absalom his son.”

Other historical superscriptions read:

- Psalm 7: “A Meditation of David, which he sang to the Lord concerning the words of Cush, a Benjamite.”
- Psalm 18: “A Psalm of David the servant of the Lord, who spoke to the Lord the words of this song on the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.”
- Psalm 34: “A Psalm of David when he pretended madness before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he departed.”
- Psalm 51: “A Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet sent to him after he had gone in to Bathsheba.”
- Psalm 52: “A Contemplation of David when Doeg the Edomite went and told Saul, and said to him, ‘David has gone to the house of Ahimelech.’”
- Psalm 54: “A Contemplation of David when the Ziphites went and said to Saul, ‘Is David not hiding with us?’”
- Psalm 56: “A Michtam of David when the Philistines captured him in Gath.”
- Psalm 57: “A Michtam of David when he fled from Saul into the cave.”
- Psalm 59: “A Michtam of David when Saul sent men, and they watched the house in order to kill him.”
- Psalm 60: “A Michtam of David. For teaching. When he fought against Mesopotamia

and Syria of Zobah, and Joab returned and killed 12,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt.”

- Psalm 63: “A Psalm of David when he was in the wilderness of Judah.”
- Psalm 142: “A Contemplation of David. A prayer when he was in the cave.”

David Had Two Great Periods of Trouble

Even where the superscriptions give us no help, a number of psalms seem to address circumstances very similar to those David experienced. Two different times in his life David experienced great trouble or crisis.

1. Before he was king, when Saul persecuted him and sought to kill him.
2. Later, as king, when his son, Absalom sought his life and he had to flee.

We will, for the purpose of this study, divide David’s life into several parts and attempt to explore some of the psalms that relate to each period.

The Early Days

Saul was the first king of Israel. We learn in 1 Samuel 15 that God decided to take the rule of Israel away from him after his capture of Agag, king of Amalek and his failure to obey God. In the next chapter, we read of Samuel being sent to the house of Jesse to anoint his youngest son, David, as the next king. At the time, David is serving as a simple shepherd.

Psalm 23, which we studied in our last lesson, most obviously draws upon the experiences of this

period and describes God as being David’s shepherd.

His Days of Exile

Of the psalms historically tied to David’s life, most relate to the period when David had to flee from King Saul. This spanned the period from Samuel initially anointing David to Saul’s death and David’s enthronement (1 Sam. 21-31).

Read Psalm 7. The superscription says it was a meditation sung concerning the words of “Cush, a Benjamite.” Who this Cush refers to is not clearly understood, though some think it refers to King Saul himself, who was a Benjamite.

- The danger David faced is described in the first two verses and a prayer offered.
- David expresses his innocence and the unjustness of his persecution in verses 3-5.



Although built long after his time, Absalom’s Pillar in the Kidron Valley of Jerusalem commemorates David’s son.

- He calls upon God to rise up in judgment on his enemies in verses 6-10.
- David then describes how God deals with the unrighteous in verses 11-16.
- David then concludes by saying he will praise God (v. 17).

Read Psalm 11. In this psalm he appears to have been advised to “flee to the mountains.” He ultimately, however, flees to God.

1. After reading the first three verses, list what you perceive to have been the general crisis or challenge. _____

2. Now, read the remainder of the psalm and record what you think David knew or learned that sustained him in this time of challenge. _____

Read Psalm 52. The superscription specifically identifies the historical incident behind this psalm. In 1 Samuel 22 we learn that Doeg’s report to King Saul later ended in a massacre of priests who had assisted David.

- Doeg’s wickedness is described in verses 1-4.
- God’s vengeance is threatened upon Doeg in verses 5-7.
- David sums up his psalm by praising God for both vengeance and protection.

Read also Psalms 18, 54, 56, 57, 59 and 142, which also describe this period of flight from King Saul.

His Days as King

After Saul’s death, David becomes king. While the volume of psalms, during this period, are not as great as during his times of trou-

ble, there are a few psalms which represent David’s expressions as God’s monarch over Israel.

Read Psalm 20. What do you find in this psalm that suggests it was written during David’s reign?

Read Psalm 21. How would you characterize the message of this psalm, in general?

Read Psalm 24. Even though David is the earthly king, to whom does he ascribe the honor of being the “king of glory”?

Read Psalm 30. This was a song sung at the dedication of the house of David.

Read also Psalms 60, 68.

Expressions of Repentance

Though David is forever identified as the “man after God’s own heart,” he also gravely sinned at times. The greatest of these times, recorded in Scripture, involved his adultery with Bathsheba, wife of Uriah the Hittite, one of the king’s soldiers. He subsequently had Uriah killed to cover up his sin. God then sent Nathan the prophet to expose and convict the king. David genuinely repented and was forgiven and in his psalms expresses profoundly his feelings about the whole matter (2 Sam. 11-12).

Read Psalm 32.

1. What do you learn about forgiveness from this psalm? _____

2. What do you learn about confession of sins? _____

3. What do you learn about the Lord’s mercy? _____

Read Psalm 51.

1. List terms David uses in connection with God’s forgiveness of his sins. _____

2. Record what you can learn from this psalm about the nature and impact of sin. _____

His Chastisement

While God forgave David his sin with Bathsheba, He did chastise him nevertheless. It began with the death of the first child he had with Bathsheba and continued with internal family problems and ultimately reached its highest point when his own son, Absalom, tries to seize his father’s throne, resulting in David having to flee for his life from Jerusalem (2 Sam. 13-19).

A number of psalms appear to have been written during this period, including Psalms 26-28.

Read Psalm 31.

1. What in the psalm might be in reference to being hunted by Absalom? _____

Another group of psalms that may fit into this time period are Psalms 38-41.

Exploration question: If God forgave David, why was the king still being chastised? If God forgives us of our sins, does that mean all the temporal consequences of our sins will disappear? What

conclusions do you reach from this exploration?

Read Psalm 53, again. While we studied this psalm earlier as possibly fitting into or referring to David's earliest years as a shepherd, re-read it and consider if it might fit into the time period we are now studying.

There are a number of psalms which speak of David in his times of trouble. It is sometimes diffi-

cult to determine whether this was when Saul sought his life or when Absalom chased him or some other unidentified time. These include Psalms 61-64, 69-70, 86, and 143.

Songs of the Fugitive

Read Psalm 3. This psalm is specifically identified in its superscription as relating to the time period when David was a fugitive from Absalom.

1. How do you think you would handle one of your children turning on you and even wanting to kill you? _____

2. How did David handle it? _____

Homework and Questions

Be sure to do your homework because what you discover will become part of our study and discussion during class.

1. Reflect on your life experiences. Choose one of each of the following and write a four-line psalm or song that expresses your feelings about that event or how you handled it.

Time of great joy: Birth of baby, graduation, marriage, obedience to gospel, etc. _____

Time of great trouble: Death in family, a sin you committed, marriage failure, etc. _____

2. Thought question: Does it help you at all to verbalize or write (express) your feelings in this way? Explain.

3. What is your favorite hymn? _____

Why do you think you like that one? _____

4. Is there anything new you have learned about David, after reading the psalms he wrote during the various periods of his life? _____

5. What is the value of a song or psalm, written by someone else, for us (you)? _____

