



## Week 21: Romans 14-16 and Psalms 1-8 Study Guide for the week of May 23-29, 2011

### Personal reflection / journaling exercise

Spend some time this week reflecting on Psalm 1. Notice this Psalm begins by describing what a wise person avoids rather than what a wise person does (Ps 1:1). What three things does a wise person avoid? Oscar Wilde described a scoffer or cynic as “a person who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.” List ways our society is cynical and the ways in which you sometimes become a scoffer. What does the wise person do (Ps 1:2)? The “law of the Lord” is another way of describing the written word of God, the Bible. Are you meditating on God’s law (God’s word) every day? How do you delight in doing everything the Lord wants? Too often, our rushed, over-extended, over-scheduled, and hurried life reflects our internal state. Our internal state that needs to be transformed. Do you struggle with finding time for prayer because you hope it will magically appear? How will you slow down this summer to spend more quality time with God in prayer and study? Are you willing to make time and space for prayer and ruthlessly deal with your rationalizations that snatch you away from prayer? Who could you ask to hold you accountable to your decision for regular prayer and reflection on the psalms? What is the result of following a life of obedience to God rather than a life of rebellion (Ps 1:3)? Is your life one of offering substance to the world like the tree producing fruit? How? What would help you to grow into being more fruitful?

**Discussion starters** *If you are leading a small group, may not have time for all of these questions. Pick the ones that will work best for your group.*

1. Ice Breaker Question: If you have one, what is one of your favorite hymns or Christian songs? Why?
2. Was there something that jumped out at you, surprised you, encouraged you, or disturbed you from the readings this last week (or two)? Why?
3. Romans 14:1 What are the “disputable matters” Paul is addressing in this chapter? What, in your opinion, are some of the disputable matters that are dividing Christians today?
4. Romans 14:7-8 This passage is often read at Christian funerals. What is the promise in this verse for you? Where in your life do you want to start living more to the Lord?
5. Romans 14:13-21 In a recent study, researchers found that Christians were more likely to ask for heroic medical measures in the last weeks of life than non-Christians. Is this surprising in the light of Romans 14:8-9 and Rom 8:38-39? Have you considered how you will approach end-of-life issues? Should faith inform these decisions? If so, how?
6. Romans 15:1-4 In your own words, described what this passage is teaching. Who is someone that God may be calling you to build up?

**Introduction to the Psalms** As you begin reading and studying the book of Psalms during our *Summer of Songs*, you are invited to read the Introduction to the Psalms at the end of this week’s study guide.

7. What do you hope to experience in reading the Psalms this summer?
8. Psalm 2 Where do you see Jesus in this psalm? Where do you see our nation behaving as though we can throw off the authority of the “One enthroned in heaven” (v. 3)?
9. Psalm 3:6 Describe a time when you felt as though you were surrounded by “enemies” on every side drawn up against you?
10. Psalm 4:4 In general, how well do you sleep? Describe the difference between having anger when you are in bed and sleeping in peace. How does this psalm encourage us to be more able to sleep in peace?

11. Psalm 5:3 As Richard Baxter counsels. have you found “the fittest time for prayer, the fittest place for prayer, and the fittest preparation of heart for prayer?” Describe your “fittest” time, place, and preparation for prayer or describe your struggle in finding your “fittest time”.
12. Psalm 6:6-7 This psalm is an individual lament. Read the descriptions of the lament psalms in the article below. Explain how you see the pattern of a lament in this psalm. Have you had a time when you grew weak with sorrow? Explain. Where in this psalm does it give expression to what you experienced?
13. Psalm 7:3-5, 14-16 Do you think that in this life most people get what they deserve? Explain. Can you recall a punishment or consequence you received that you deserved? Explain.
14. Psalm 8 This is a great hymn of praise that is often quoted in our hymns and songs. What part of this psalm gives expression to what you think about God? Explain.

## **Bible verse to memorize: Psalm 1:1-2**

### **Caring Time**

It is important to make time in your group to care for each other. Sometimes that happens during the discussion and sometimes it is best to end your time together praying for each other. One possibility this week would be for each of you to answer the following question and then have the person to your right pray for you in light of the answer you gave.

**How can we pray for you to have a deeper and more consistent time of prayer?**

In the spirit of Psalm 8, summer is a great time to immerse yourself in the wonder and awe of God’s creation. Make plans now with your small group to spend a night stargazing or join together for an afternoon picnic under the trees or by a river, or take an evening to play tag with the neighborhood children. Brainstorm other ways to experience and celebrate God’s majesty this summer together.

## **Introduction to the Psalms**

One way to understand the book of Psalms is that this is the worship hymnal of ancient Israel. These are the hymns (or songs) that the ancient Hebrews used in their worship services. We have the green Lutheran Book of Worship that we use in the traditional worship service. In the contemporary worship service we have the songs that are projected on the screen. The singing of hymns and songs in worship is a very important and meaningful part of the worship for many people. This music and poetry gives deep expression to our worship of God, to our experiences in life, and to our crying out to God in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. The Psalms are worship songs.

As you read and study the Psalms during our *Summer of Songs* you are invited to keep the following in mind. As you read each Psalm, don’t get bogged down in trying to understand every word or phrase. This is poetry. Without the help of a commentary or Study Bible, it may be difficult to understand what is meant by each word or phrase. Instead, let the poetry speak to you. Look for the phrase, sentence, or verse that gives expression to what you are experiencing in your walk with the Lord on the day you are reading that particular psalm. St Athanasius once said, “Most scriptures speak to us; the Psalms speak for us.” What has been the great value of the Psalms to God’s people over the centuries is how a psalm can give deep expression to what one is experiencing at any one moment. Jesus cried out from Psalm 22 when he was in agony on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

You will be reading through the Psalms slowly, with only one or two psalms each day. When there are two psalms assigned for a day, read one in the morning and one at night. Savor each psalm. Take time to contemplate what the words are saying. This is not a book to rapidly read through so you can check a box. These are God-inspired expressions of faith that will move you into a deeper intimacy with God if you allow the psalms to speak to your heart. Before you read each psalm, pause briefly to pray. Ask the Lord to speak to you through that psalm you are about to read. Then look for the portion of that psalm which gives expression or speaks to what you are experiencing in life at that moment. God, in His manifold wisdom, will make it seem as though that psalm was written just for you on that particular day. And really it was because that is how God rolls!

If you have been in worship long enough, you may have noticed that we sing particular hymns or songs to fit certain occasions. Christmas carols, Lenten hymns, Easter hymns, hymns at funerals, songs at the beginning of the worship, patriotic hymns, and others, have particular occasions when they give meaningful expression to what we are experiencing. If you look in the Lutheran Book of Worship, you will see that the hymns are grouped together under headings like Advent, Holy Communion, Close of Service, Christian Hope, and Society, to name a few. The same is true for the Psalms. Biblical scholars have attempted to categorize the Psalms according to what they believe was the original occasion when a psalm was sung in ancient Israel. Each category of psalms seems to have its own unique form, content, and pattern. Some readers of the Psalms have found it helpful to know what kind of psalm they are reading. Below is an article from the Holman Bible Dictionary that will help you understand these categories. You are invited to read through this article. Don't get bogged down in trying to understand everything completely, but simply learn what are the general categories of the Psalms. You may want to refer back to this article when you are reading particular psalms.

Tips when reading this article: The word "cult" or "cultic" is used by Biblical scholars simply to refer to the worship life of a group of people, so think of the word "worship" when you read these words. Likewise, the word "liturgical" describes material used in public worship. "The Hebrew Bible" refers to what we call the Old Testament. You may want to have a dictionary ready to look up the meanings of some other words used in this article.

### **From the Holman Bible Dictionary**

The Psalms are a collection of songs of praise that are theological statements and poetically represent human dialogue with God. The Psalms is the most complete collection of Hebrew poetry and worship material in the Hebrew Bible. The Psalms give clues for understanding Israelite worship on both a corporate and individual level. The psalms typify different responses to God's actions and word. An important key for reading and interpreting different psalms is to understand the nature of Hebrew poetry. Psalms are poetic in contrast to being narrative.

As the twentieth century began, Hermann Gunkel brought a new approach to the Psalms, seeking to discover the type or form of literary material in each Psalm and the worship situation behind each. Gunkel categorized several main types of psalms and understood that not all psalms fit neatly into one category. They might be a combination of types and thus belong to a category of mixed psalms. Following Gunkel, scholars have proposed several systems to categorize the Psalms. Most include the different types: (1) the hymn; (2) songs of thanksgiving; (3) the community laments; (4) the individual laments; (5) the individual songs of thanksgiving; (6) the royal psalms; and (7) wisdom psalms.

Clear-cut categorization is not possible for every psalm, nor does every psalm fit a particular category. Also, every cultic or original life situation is not discernible. The issue for the reader and interpreter of the psalms is to appreciate the artistry of a poet which created and crafted timeless poetic expressions which fit into many contexts of worship or an individual's life situation in different cultures and traditions.

A reader of the Psalms will find that different psalms can be grouped by similarities of form, content, and pattern. Yet, variations do occur, and each psalm is unique in both message and content. The following is descriptive of the various psalm types.

1. **A lament** is expressed both by the community (for example, 44; 74; 79) and by the individual (22; 38; 39; 41; 54). Both types of laments are prayers or cries to God on the occasion of distressful situations. Of the two forms, differences are related to the types of trouble and the experiences of salvation. For the community the trouble may be an enemy; with an individual it may be an illness. The basic pattern includes an invocation of God, a description of the petitioner's complaint(s), a recalling of past salvation experiences (usually community laments), petitions, a divine response (or oracle), and a concluding vow of praise.
2. **The thanksgiving or psalms of narrative praise** are also spoken by the community (see 106; 124; 129) and the individual (see 9; 18; 30). These psalms are related to the laments as they are responses to liberation occurring after distress. They are expressions of joy and are fuller forms of the lament's vow of praise.
3. **The hymn** (see 8; 19; 29) is closest in form to a song of praise as sung in modern forms of worship. These psalms are uniquely liturgical and could be sung antiphonally, some have repeating refrains (see Psalms 8:1). The hymn normally includes a call to praise. Then the psalm describes the reasons for praising God. The structure is not as clear-cut as other types of psalms. **Creation psalms** (usually reflecting a mixed form) include Psalms 8:1; Psalms 19:1; Psalms 104:1; and Psalms 139:1. These psalms are concerned with praising God and describe Him as Creator. Emphasis may be placed on God as Creator of heaven and earth, as Creator of humanity, or as the Creator of different elements of creation. The psalms affirm God who is Creator as the Lord of history.
4. Some psalms reflect more specific liturgical events. **The liturgical psalms** may include antiphonal responses or dialogue. There may be exhortations to listeners to prostrate themselves or to walk in a procession. These psalms include instructions for sacrifice, worship, processions, or may invoke blessings on the worshipers. These are usually regarded as psalms of mixed type as they share similarities with the hymns. This designation includes those psalms which may have been sung by pilgrims on their way to the sanctuary (see the songs of ascents, 120–134). **Songs of Zion** (such as 46) call for God's protection of the city of God. Some psalms are considered **royal psalms** (see 2; 18; 20). These psalms are concerned with the earthly king of Israel. Again, these are usually understood as mixed psalms. They were used to celebrate the king's enthronement. They may have included an oracle for the king. In some cases (such as Psalms 72:1), prayers were made to intercede on behalf of the king. Another mixed type are the **enthronement psalms** which celebrate Yahweh's kingship (see Psalms 96-99). They are closely related to the hymns and to the creation psalms. However, the main difference is a celebration of Yahweh as king over all creation.

5. A final type of psalm (see Psalms 1:1) is **the wisdom psalm**. They have poetic form and style but are distinguished because of content and a tendency toward the proverbial. These psalms contemplate questions of theodicy (73), or celebrate God's Word (the Torah, Psalms 119:1), or deal with two different ways of living—that of the godly person or the evil person (Psalms 1:1).

The psalms are not neatly or easily categorized, as the mixed psalms indicate. However, such identification helps the reader to know that type of psalm is being read, with a possible original context or a fitting present context in worship.

**The Book of Psalms is divided into five sections** just as the Pentateuch has five books. Each section of the Book of Psalms concludes with a doxology. See Psalms 41:13; Psalms 72:18-19; Psalms 89:52; Psalms 106:48; Psalms 150:1. Psalms 1:1 introduces the book by dividing people into two categories and describing the fate of each. Psalms 150:1 closes Psalms with a symphony of praise. Otherwise, a way to describe a theological structure for the book as a whole has not been found. What devoted students of God's Word have discovered is the limited number of types of prayer represented in the Psalms. A look at the major types helps us understand how many different functions prayer and praise can serve as we communicate with and worship God.

1. **Psalms of lamentation or complaint** cry out for help in a situation of distress or frustration. Psalmists protest their innocence or confess their sins. They vow to praise God and give thanks for deliverance. Such psalms show prayer as an honest communication with God in life's worst situations. The following psalms are laments: 3, 4, 6, 7, 12, 13, 17, 22, 25, 26, 28, 35, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42–43, 44, 51, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 60, 61, 63, 64, 69, 70, 71, 74, 77, 79, 80, 83, 85, 86, 88, 90, 94, 102, 109, 123, 126, 130, 134, 137, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144.
2. **Psalms of thanksgiving** describe a situation of distress and how God delivered the psalmist. The psalmist promises to fulfill vows made to God during the distress and invites the congregation to join in thanksgiving and praise to God. These psalms show us our need to acknowledge God's work in our times of trouble and to witness to others of what God has done for us. Thanksgiving psalms are 9–10, 18, 30, 31, 32, 34, 66, 92, 107, 116, 118, 120, 124, 129, 138, 139.
3. **Hymns** lift the congregation's praise to God, describing God's greatness and majesty. In the hymn, worshipers invite one another to praise God and to provide reasons for such praise. These psalms are hymns: 8, 19, 29, 33, 65, 100, 103, 104, 105, 111; 113, 114, 117, 135, 136, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150.
4. **Wisdom psalms** probe life's mysteries to teach the congregation about itself and God. These include Psalms 1, Psalms 14:1, Psalms 36:1, Psalms 37:1, Psalms 49:1, Psalms 53:1, Psalms 73:1, Psalms 78:1, Psalms 112:1, Psalms 119:1, Psalms 127:1, Psalms 128:1, Psalms 133:1.
5. **Kingship psalms** detail the role of the human king in God's rule over His people. They also point ahead to the Messiah, who would inaugurate God's kingdom. From them we learn to pray for and respect the role of government officials as well as praise God's Messiah. These include Psalms 2:1, Psalms 18:1, Psalms 20:1, Psalms 21:1, Psalms 28:1, Psalms 45:1, Psalms 61:1, Psalms 63:1, Psalms 72:1, Psalms 89:1, Psalms 101:1, Psalms 110:1, Psalms 132:1.

6. **Entrance ceremonies** provide questions and answers to teach the expectations God has of His worshipers. Psalms 15:1 and Psalms 24:1 are entrance ceremonies.
7. **Enthronement psalms** praise Yahweh as the King enthroned over His universe. They include Psalms 47:1, Psalms 93:1, Psalms 96:1, Psalms 97:1, Psalms 98:1, Psalms 99:1.
8. **Songs of Zion** praise God indirectly by describing the Holy City where He has chosen to live among His people and be worshiped. They show God lives among His people to protect and direct their lives. These are Psalms 46:1, Psalms 48:1, Psalms 76:1, Psalms 84:1, Psalms 87:1, Psalms 122:1, Psalms 132:1.
9. **Psalms of confidence** express trust in God's care for and leadership of His people. These appear in Psalms 4:1, Psalms 11:1, Psalms 16:1, Psalms 23:1, Psalms 27:1, Psalms 62:1, Psalms 125:1, Psalms 131:1.
10. **Prophetic psalms** announce God's will to His worshiping people. These are 50, 52, 58, 81, 82, 91, 95.
11. **Liturgical psalms** describe activities and responses of God's worshiping congregation. These appear in Psalms 67:1, Psalms 68:1, Psalms 75:1, Psalms 106:1, Psalms 108:1, Psalms 115:1, Psalms 121:1.