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*The author lives in Cary, North Carolina with her husband Wade and
children Will and Emily. She attends Colonial Baptist Church. She can be
contacted at elizabethficken@nc.rr.com.*

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The Book of Psalms

“Blessed is the man...”! What an exciting beginning to the book of Psalms! Who doesn’t want to be blessed by the Lord? Who doesn’t want to be happy? The true way to find happiness is laid out before us in the psalms. As we read and study one psalm after another, and consider not only what the individual psalm says but what the book of Psalms communicates to us as a whole, we will see that which brings true happiness, joy, and delight.

Flowers are an earthly blessing from the Lord that bring me happiness. I’ve begun to think of each psalm as a beautiful flower, with the book of Psalms containing many varieties, colors, shapes, and scents. Some are small and delicate, others larger with bright, bold colors. Some flowers have one exquisite bloom while others have multiple miniature blossoms. We will see great variety in the psalms, and will enjoy their unique contribution to the bouquet of our study one by one. Almost everyone has a favorite flower, and a favorite psalm. If yours wasn’t picked for this particular bouquet, you’ll still have a chance to enjoy its beauty as we go along!

We’re going to start at the beginning, then look at one psalm after another, based on the order that the compiler of this great book created under divine inspiration. We will see that the final author had a reason for arranging the psalms in this particular order. In between the psalms we are studying, there will be a section entitled “Arranging the Flowers” in which I will briefly describe the psalms we are not studying and how they relate or connect to the psalms around them.

Let’s go ahead and look at how we know that someone put it all together on purpose. Turn to Psalm 42. What heading is given at this point in the Psalms?

How does the previous psalm end? Write out the verse from Psalm 41:13.

Now turn to Psalm 73. What heading is given here?

How does the previous psalm end? Write out the verse from Psalm 72:18-19.

Turn to Psalm 90. What heading do you find?

Are you already looking at the ending of the previous psalm? Write out the verse from Psalm 89:52.

Book Four of the Psalms is a very short one! Turn to Psalm 107. What heading is given here?

What is the conclusion to Book Four, in Psalm 106:48?

Finally, turn to Psalm 146. The last four psalms of the Psalter create an extended doxology, praising the Lord, just as Books One, Two, Three, and Four did. Look at the first lines of Psalms 146, 147, 148, 149, and 150. What refrain is repeated in each of these psalms and all the way through the very last one?

You've just seen the grand finale, the great conclusion, and most important point of the book of Psalms! As we study the psalms together, we will see that the psalms are ordered in such a way as to lead us to think correctly about our God and to respond to Him according to who He is. He is worthy of our praise and worship!

The first two Psalms are crucial to our perspective of all that follow, so we will study them as the introduction to the book of Psalms in this lesson and the next.

Psalm One

Please read Psalm 1.



Following each first reading of the Psalm, please take time to record your reflections, your questions, or your prayers in response to what you have read. This is an exercise in reading, meditating upon, and contemplating God's Word.

Respond with your reflections, questions, prayers or praise.

This psalm presents clear word pictures that contrast godly lives versus ungodly lives. Let's list these contrasts side by side.

The Blessed Man

The Wicked Man

The key to man's blessedness is found in verse 2. What makes a man happy?

There are two words that we should make sure that we understand. Please look up the following words in a Hebrew lexicon (for word definitions) and a Bible dictionary (for further information).

Law: Strong's #8451

Hebrew word:

Hebrew definition:

Meditate: Strong's #1897

Hebrew word:

Hebrew definition:

Delight: Strong's #2656

Hebrew word:

Hebrew definition:

When you think of the “law” of the Lord, what comes to mind? What books of the Bible contain the law? Did you learn in your research that the first five books of the Bible are called the “Torah” and that the word essentially means “teaching” or “instruction”? This concept helps us understand how Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy are called the “Law”; they are the words of the Lord that have been recorded for our instruction. These are probably the books that the psalmist was referring to in verse 2.

Do you take great delight in the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy?

Arranging the Flowers

Psalms 20, 21, and 22

While Psalm 21 is a grand psalm of the royal splendor of the Messiah and of victory over His enemies, and it is found in the middle of Book One as a centerpiece of hope, it is also has a very important place in relation to the psalms around it. First, it shows the answer to the prayer prayed in Psalm 20.

Psalm 20:4 – May He grant you your heart's desire...

... Psalm 21:2 – You have given him his heart's desire

Psalm 20:6, 9 – Now I know that the Lord saves His anointed...

... Psalm 21:1 – O Lord, in Your strength the king will be glad,
and in Your salvation how greatly he will rejoice!

In addition, with Psalm 21:7 being the key verse of this psalm, the stage is set for an example of the King trusting the Lord in the deepest, darkest circumstances – that of His own death – as described in Psalm 22. Psalm 20 is a prayer for the Lord to answer and save the King, Psalm 21 is a statement of the strength of the Lord and the King's trust in Him, and Psalm 22 is a desperate cry for the Lord to answer and save (Psalm 22:19) as well as a declaration that the Lord has answered (Psalm 22:22-24). Psalm 22 truly testifies that through the loving-kindness of the Lord, the one who trusts in Him will not be shaken.

Psalm Twenty-Two

It is time now to approach a psalm with which you may be familiar as a prophecy of Christ's death on the cross. It begins with a deep lament, with an expression of devastating grief. But what we will find in this psalm may surprise you. It is a picture of one who is trusting in the Lord even during the most distressing time in his life, and it includes an exciting look at the promises of his future. While Psalm 21 was about the blessings and victory that the King receives because He trusts in the Lord, Psalm 22 describes the mysterious agony one can experience even when trusting in the Lord.

Please read Psalm 22.



This psalm which began with such dark despair ends with a grand display of praise to the Lord because of His miraculous work on the cross. What does Psalm 22:30 - 31 declare?

It is fascinating that the last words of this psalm are equivalent in meaning to the last words of Jesus on the cross: “It is finished!” (John 19:30) Because the demands of our holy God were met by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, all who believe in Jesus Christ will be made righteous by trusting in Him.

Let us therefore respond to Christ’s words to us from this psalm:

“You who fear the Lord – praise Him...
and stand in awe of Him, all you descendants of Israel.”
Psalm 22:23

Psalm Twenty-Three

We have come to one of the most cherished of all blooms in the arrangement of our bouquet. Like a deep red rose, this psalm is elegant, but simple; richly scented with scenes from the meadows; marked with thorns of danger; and it carries the message of the love of the Lord. Receive it today as a gift, and take time to appreciate all that it has to communicate to you.

Please read Psalm 23.



Respond with your reflections, questions, prayers or praise.

This is the type of Scripture that almost seems too beautiful, too meaningful in its entirety to examine in an in-depth manner. If you did not enjoy a quiet moment with the Lord during your reading of it, please go back and just take time to be still and quiet as you read it once again.

Arranging the Flowers

Psalm 69

What mourning and grief, trials and suffering are expressed through this prayer. But once again, in the midst of suffering, faith in God stands out. “Answer me, O Lord, for Your lovingkindness is good; according to the greatness of Your compassion, turn to me, and do not hide Your face from Your servant, for I am in distress; answer me quickly.” (Ps. 69:16 – 17) The question is – what is this prayer doing here immediately after the anthem of praise in Psalm 68? This one is by David, and like the previous psalm, looks forward to God’s fulfillment of His promise to establish His kingdom in Zion. This psalm expresses the misery that David and the nation are experiencing while they wait for the King to come.

Psalm 69 is distinctly messianic, as it finds its ultimate fulfillment in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the most quoted psalms in the New Testament, it was applied by the apostles to the rejection suffered by Christ. From this psalm we see a foreshadowing of our Lord’s persecution by the world (v. 4; cf. John 15:25), zeal for God (v. 9; cf. John 2:17), and circumstances of the cross (v.21; cf. Matt. 27:48). From this prophetic vantage point, we learn in this psalm that Christ is the perfect embodiment of righteousness that was persecuted by evil men for doing God’s will and God’s work. Likewise, all believers today who live godly lives in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). ¹

Psalm 70

Come quickly, Lord! That’s the urgent plea of this short psalm – which is identical to the last verses of Psalm 40. It is possible that it was placed here, a second time in the psalter, because its urgent cries so appropriately restate the requests of Psalm 69. By itself, it’s a model prayer for us – short – intense – and eager. In the context of Psalm 69, 70 and 71, it becomes a cry for God to set up His universal Kingdom and send His eternal King – soon!

Psalms 71 and 72

We are coming to the close of Book II. You will see that the two psalms at the end of this book are strategically placed. Psalm 71, while not given a title in the Hebrew text, is attributed to David in the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) and seems to be the prayer of an aged man. Psalm 72 is either by Solomon or for him. In either case, the psalm is a prayer for the son of the king. David’s reign was coming to an end, and the heir to the kingdom would soon be seated on the throne.

Psalm One Hundred and Eighteen

Please read Psalm 118.



Respond with your reflections, questions, prayers or praise.

It's been a long time since we've mentioned the poetic device called "inclusio." The first and the last lines are the same, indicating the theme of the poem. This psalm repeats its major theme in verse 1 and verse 29 emphasizing an attribute of the Lord.

What is the main theme of Psalm 118?

What in the psalm gives evidence of this theme? Record phrases below. Make sure you notice an important word (it's repeated three times).

You have probably already noticed several familiar verses and have realized that this psalm is quoted in the New Testament. It is filled with hope for the Messiah to be the One who comes in the name of the Lord to save the people. Let's spend some time looking at how this psalm was spoken by and applied to Jesus.

O LORD, do save, we beseech You;
O LORD, we beseech You, do send prosperity!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD;
We have blessed you from the house of the LORD.
Psalm 118:25-26

What was the reason that Jesus quoted from this verse in Luke 13:34-35?

What was the occasion and why was this verse quoted in Matthew 21:1-11?

Hosanna! This word is the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew “*hoshi-ah na*” in Psalm 118:25 and it means “please save us!”

Please look up the following words:

Save: Strong's #3467

Hebrew word:

Hebrew definition:

Salvation: Strong's #3444

Hebrew word:

Hebrew definition:

Jesus:

Strong's Greek#2424

Greek word:

Greek definition:

Strong's Hebrew #3091

Hebrew word:

Hebrew definition:

Do you see the connection between the words save, salvation and Jesus? What is it?

Why did the crowd cry out for salvation? The accounts above don't show the reason that the Israelite crowd cried out for salvation, but history tells us that they wanted freedom from foreign oppression. At the time of Christ, the Romans were ruling over the land and the people. Just as Psalm 118 described, Israel was surrounded by enemies. They were looking for their Messiah to deliver them from other nations and return their national identity to them once again.

Have you cried out to be saved? From what?

How do the following verses explain why we need salvation?

Romans 2:5-6

Galatians 3:10

Ephesians 2:1-2, 12

Jesus' last days in Jerusalem provided salvation for all who would ask Him for it. A few days after Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, He told a parable and quoted this psalm. He understood the reason that God had sent Him to earth.

Please read Matthew 21:33-45.

In the parable, what happened to the son of the landowner?

What will happen to the vinedressers?

What is the correlation between the parable and the quote from Psalm 118:22? Who is the stone? Who are the builders?

How are you responding to the Son of God? Is there anything about Him that you are rejecting? His authority? His instructions?

After Jesus' death and resurrection, Peter came to understand what he had been taught and he declared the truth of who Jesus was to the Sanhedrin when he was arrested.

Please read Acts 4:5-12.

Who does Peter say is “the stone which was rejected”?

Who does Peter say rejected the stone?

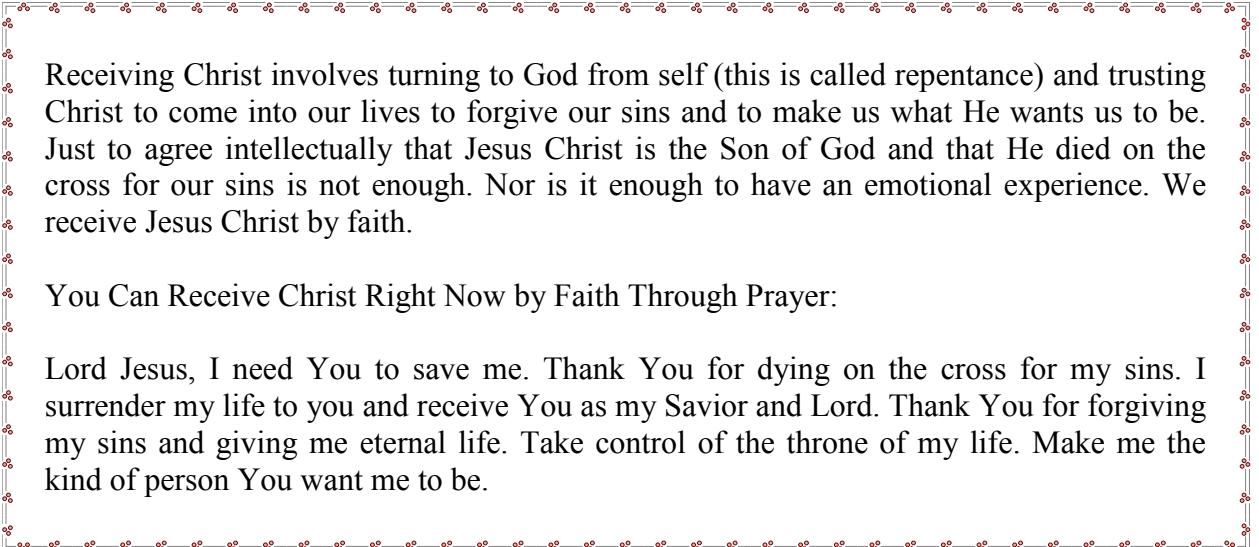
What is the correlation between Psalm 118:21-26 and Acts 4:12?

We observed earlier that the theme of Psalm 118 was the goodness and lovingkindness of God. The New Testament authors realized that God's character was intricately related to salvation.

Please read Titus 3:4-7.

What does this verse tell you about the reason God has given salvation?

What does this verse tell you about how God gives salvation?



Please turn back to Psalm 118:23-24. What was the psalmist's response to the statement made in verse 22?

Is the salvation of the Lord through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection "marvelous in your eyes?" How is it "the Lord's doing?"

What else can we say except: "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good: For His lovingkindness is everlasting." Praise the Lord. Hallelujah. Jesus saves.

Psalm One Hundred and Nineteen

Here we are. At the longest psalm in the Psalter. At the longest chapter in the Bible. At a poem which is longer than thirty individual books of the Bible! Before beginning my study of Psalm 119, I was familiar with its theme. I knew that it reflected on the Word of God, His commands, His laws, His ways. But I thought that because every line of this poem referred to the Word of God, it would be repetitive. I thought this psalm would just say the same thing over and over again. It doesn't!



This psalm is like the field of flowers on the cover of our workbook – we'll be looking at the same "species" of flower – but the field is full of many colors, and there is much that is communicated through this poem. "The simple form of the diction makes it unnecessary to expound the psalm in detail." This is good news! This psalm is simple enough to understand without doing great research and cross-referencing. We will spend our time in this lesson reading and absorbing what the author has expressed in this masterpiece of poetry.

At this point in our lesson, I normally ask you to read the psalm in its entirety. It's not quite time for that yet. I want you to see the structure of this psalm. It has 22 stanzas – or sections, corresponding to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Each stanza is eight lines long, and each line begins with the same letter of the alphabet appropriate to that stanza. One commentator has called this "a holy alphabet for Zion's scholars."

Here's the Hebrew alphabet:

aleph	א	waw	ו	kaf	כ	ayin	ע	shin	שׁ
bet	ב	tzayin	צ	lamed	ל	pe	פ	tav	ת
gimel	ג	khet	ח	mem	מ	tsade	צ		
dalet	ד	tet	ת	nun	נ	qof	ק		
he	ה	yod	י	samek	ס	resh	ר		

Your Bibles may have the appropriate Hebrew letter and its name above the corresponding stanzas.

What you will see on the next page will probably seem very strange, but the beauty of this psalm can be captured just by looking at it in the original Hebrew language. You don't have to know Hebrew! Just look at the first letter of each line on the far right! (Hebrew is written from right to left... to illustrate with English letters – the word **psalms** would be: **smlasp**.)

Highlight the first word, or letter of each stanza. Use four different colors – one for verses 1 – 8, one for verses 9 – 16, one for verses 17 – 24, and one for verses 25 – 32.

Continuing in the same vein as the preceding Davidic psalms (140 – 143), David now calls on the Lord to come to the rescue of the righteous. In the imagery used here by David, however, a new dimension is given to his prayers. There is a clear note of imminency sounded in this psalm, coupled with a widening of his vision of God's intervention. David prays that God would "part the heavens... and come down; touch the mountains, so that they smoke" (v.5). Elsewhere in the Scriptures such language is usually reserved for the descriptions of the Lord's victorious coming at the end of the ages (cf. Dan 7:14; Hab 3:3-6).

In light of the fact that the book of Psalms has increasingly focused the reader's attention to the imminent hope of the coming of the Lord, it seems likely that the composer sees in David's poetic imagery an expression of the same hope. He intends for us to draw the conclusion that David himself shared the hope of the Lord's glorious and victorious return. Certainly the picture David paints at the close of this psalm shows that he expected God's intervention on his behalf to do more than to restore normalcy. He expected the Lord's return to establish a kingdom of peace and prosperity unequaled by anything Israel had yet experienced (144:12-15).¹

Psalm One Hundred and Forty-Five

Are you ready for the return of the Lord? Come, let us worship Him now, practicing our songs as we anticipate His arrival!

What does Psalm 144:9-10 say?

This is the prelude to the grand finale of praise! New songs, many songs, songs from everything on earth are going to resound throughout the heavens as we worship our King. Psalm 145 is a new song, unlike any that David has ever sung before.

Please read Psalm 145.



Respond with your reflections, questions, prayers or praise.

I believe this psalm is one of David's greatest legacies. It is his most beautiful utterance and the sincere expression of adoration and devotion from one who truly was a man after God's own heart.

What is the title given for this psalm?

Please look up the following word and its root word:

Praise: Strong's #8416

from root word: Strong's #1984

Hebrew word:

Hebrew word:

Hebrew definition:

Hebrew definition:

This is the only psalm in all of the 150 recorded for eternity which bears this title, specifically being a song of praise! The term “tehillah” was deemed so special and excellent that it was taken from this psalm and given to the whole collection – entitled by the Jews as “sefer tehillim” – Book of Praises.

Psalm 145 is an acrostic, which as we have mentioned previously, is a form of poetry using the alphabet as a guide. This type of poetry is used to focus on one particular theme, and the theme of this psalm is God's greatness as King.

To whom does David address this praise in Psalm 145:1?

What does he plan to do according to verses 1-2?

This psalm of great praise is full of action. List the words and verbs that indicate what David and the people will do in their adoration of the King.

For example: v.1 – I will extol You, I will bless Your name