

SESSION 5: PSALMS

PREPARATION FOR THE SESSION

Read Psalms 2, 45, 69, 110 & 137.

Summary of the Video: Module 2, Episode 5

This is a supplementary session that we've produced in-house, bringing together material on the Psalms from Sessions 3 and 4.

SUNG WORSHIP, MUSIC AND PSALMS

Andrew Wilson starts with an introduction to the Psalms. He describes their place in ancient worship, their various forms, how to think of them in our personal lives, and he gives us a challenge for our corporate worship.

David brought songs into the centre of Israelite worship and the gathering together of the Psalter ensured it would last. The Psalms include a wide range of content, tone, and emotion that is often lacking in modern church meetings: praise, lament, thanksgiving, cries of trouble, repentant prayers, denunciations of injustice, etc. Andrew Wilson emphasizes the emotional variation of the Psalms compared to the tendencies of modern worship. As we read them, we must remember that most Psalms express feeling and emotion rather than abstract theology or direct doctrinal teaching.

RESPONSES TO ENEMIES

Andrew Wilson considers the “imprecatory” Psalms (e.g. 69, 109, 137), i.e. those that beg God to bring immediate and often violent judgment on his enemies. He encourages us to read the texts in context, look for God’s heart and character, ask what’s wrong in us that these would appear wrong to us, and read them through the New Covenant posture toward enemies.

THE MESSIANIC PSALMS

We conclude by looking at the how the Messiah features in the Psalms. Session 3 of this module introduced us to the concept of “telescoping” in prophecy. Often the promises of God have a near “fulfillment” (in a human king or local event) and a far “fulfillment” (in the Messiah or an eschatological event). Andrew Wilson considers how the Messianic prophecies in Psalms 2, 45, 72, 89, and 110 find their fulfilment in Jesus before looking at the importance of Psalm 22 for how Mark presents his account of Jesus’ crucifixion.

Watch Video

Watch [Module 2, Episode 5](#) (22 minutes).

Sung Worship, Music and the Psalms

- Israelite worship always contained an element of sung praise
 - The song of Moses (Ex 15)
 - Deborah's song (Judges 5)
 - Hannah's prayer (1 Sam 2)
- However, David is credited with bringing corporate singing into the heart of Jewish worship
 - In 1 Chr 16, David appoints Levites at the tabernacle at Gibeon, to praise God with music and singing (4-6, 41-42), then appoints Asaph as the chief "worship leader" and entrusts a psalm to him (7-36)
 - The official collection of psalms grows and eventually becomes the songbook of Israel
- The Book of Psalms is arranged in five books, which are believed to have been from 5 separate collections
 - There are numerous authors: David (73), Solomon, Asaph, Heman, the Sons of Korah, Moses ...
 - There are also a variety of forms
 - Praise songs, lament, thanksgiving, cries from trouble, repentance prayers, denunciations of injustice, teaching ... Luther called the Psalms "a Bible in miniature"
 - Obviously, the Psalms are poems and songs rather than doctrinal statements, and they express feelings and emotions more than abstract truths
 - This is not just true of the "negative" Psalms (e.g. 137), but the "positive" ones as well (e.g. 91)
 - They have the distinctive Hebrew form of rhyming meanings (parallelism), which – beautifully – means their poetic form can be translated into any language
 - They also express both personal (7) and corporate (8) worship in their original settings, and can and should be used today to do both (cf. Eph 5:19)

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Responses to Enemies

- Several of the "imprecatory" Psalms involve the writer imploring God to punish his enemies in ways that seem shockingly harsh to Christians (e.g. 69, 109, 137)
- Some of these "outbursts" sit in the midst of otherwise "lovely" Psalms; others would, if written today, render the author liable to prosecution under the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006
 - "O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar ... I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well ... How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you. **If only you would slay the wicked, O God! Away from me, you bloodthirsty men!** They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name. **Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD,** and abhor those who rise up against you? **I have nothing but hatred for them;** I count them my enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps 139)
 - "O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us – **he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks!**" (Psalm 137:8-9)
- Several questions emerge from Psalms like these
 - How are we to handle these psalms without undermining their canonicity?
 - Is there something to learn about expressing emotion and being real with God?
 - Are the Psalmists speaking hyperbolically, literally, or something else?
 - Do they express mere personal animosity, or do they also show God's righteousness (e.g. 139:21)?
 - Do they seem harsh merely because we are out of touch with future judgment (hell etc)?
 - How are such Psalms to be interpreted in the new covenant age (cf. Matt 5:21-26, 38-42, 43-48)?
 - What can we learn from them about facing injustice and oppression in our own day?
 - How can we as Christians beneficially use these Psalms?

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The Gospel in the Messianic Psalms (2, 22, 45, 72, 89, 110)

- The work of the Messiah in the Psalms
 - The heir of the Davidic covenant. "I will establish his line for ever, his throne as long as the heavens endure" (89:29)
 - The heir of the Abrahamic covenant. "Then all nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed" (72:17)
 - A priest like Melchizedek. "The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest for ever, in the order of Melchizedek'" (110:4)
 - Concerned for morality & justice. "You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy" (45:7)
 - Faces world opposition. "Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the LORD and against his anointed" (2:1-2)
 - Ultimately victorious. "I will crush his foes before him and strike down his adversaries" (89:23)
 - Brings peace and prosperity. "In his days may the righteous flourish and prosperity abound till the moon is no more" (72:7)
 - Establishes an everlasting Kingdom. "Your throne will last forever and ever" (45:6)
- The identity of the Messiah in the Psalms
 - The Messiah will be at Yahweh's right hand, greater than David (110:4). This is why Jesus asked, "If then David calls him 'Lord', how can he be his son?" (Matt 22:45)
 - The Messiah is described as being begotten by Yahweh (2:7)
 - Most puzzlingly of all, Psalm 45 is addressed to a king who is referred to as "God" (*elohim*): "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever ... Therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions" (45:6-7; cf. Heb 1:8-9)
- The suffering of the Messiah in the Psalms
 - Psalm 22 gives a very different presentation of the Messiah, which would not be recognised as Messianic until the NT (although it coheres well with the Servant songs of Isaiah)
 - Several Davidic Psalms are explicitly cited in the NT in connection with the Messiah's suffering (22:1 etc; 31:5; 109:8)

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Psalm 22 and Mark 15

Psalm 22:1-31

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest ... All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; "He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!" ...

I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet—I can count all my bones—they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.

You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel! ...

For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him. From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will perform before those who fear him ...

For kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations. Posterity shall serve him; it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation; they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it.

Mark 15:24-39

And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. And it was the third hour when they crucified him. And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left.

And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him ...

And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Elijah." And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down."

And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

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GROUP MEETING:

Discussion Questions

Before getting into these specific questions, spend a few minutes discussing what struck you or stuck with you from the video. What were some of the main points? Did any of Andrew's comments or questions open up the Bible in a profound way to you? Also, ask if anything was confusing or needs clarification.

1. What would it look like for your local church's liturgy (the songs, prayers, Scripture readings, and other activities of Sunday worship) to be shaped by the whole of the Psalter (book of Psalms)? What might stop or hinder you from moving in that direction? What benefits would there be?
2. How does "telescoping" affect the way we read the Old Testament in general? What have you noticed about the ways that Andrew Wilson looks forward to Jesus as he reads OT stories and Psalms?
3. Pick one of the messianic Psalms that Andrew Wilson addresses (Psalm 2, 45, 72, 89, 110). Draw out some of what this Psalm informs us about the Messiah and the Gospel.

Meditation on Scripture

Psalm 47:1-8

Psalm 110

Putting This Session into Practice

This week, use the Psalms in your own prayer time to pray for justice for the oppressed. You might like to start with Psalm 69.