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The Psalms: Where God and People Meet Heart to Heart



The Psalms are prayers and hymns of the Bible *par excellence*. Uttered in praise, joy, sorrow, and despair; spoken or sung in private and in public by laypeople, kings, poets, and priests; coming from both the righteous and repentant sinners, the Psalms have served as the prayer book and the hymnbook to generations of believers.

The book of Psalms owes its distinct role to the fact that while most of the Bible speaks *to* us, the Psalms speak *for* us and *with* us. The Psalms are a source of blessing, hope, and revival, a guide for both self-reflection and reflection on God's greatness, liberating when one cries out of the depths, and captivating for a renewed surrender to God. It is thus not surprising that many people find the Psalms resonating with their emotions and experiences and adopt them as their own prayers. Luther poignantly speaks of the Psalms: "Where can one find nobler words to express joy than in the Psalms of praise or gratitude? In them you can see into the hearts of all the saints as if you were looking at a lovely pleasure-garden, or were gazing into heaven. . . . Or where can one find more profound, more penitent, more sorrowful words in which to express grief than in the Psalms of lamentation? In these, you see into the hearts of all the saints as if you were looking at death or gazing into hell, so dark and obscure is the scene rendered by the changing shadows of the wrath of God. . . . It is therefore easy to understand why the book of Psalms is the favourite book of all the saints. For every man on every occasion can find in it Psalms which fit his needs, which he feels to be as appropriate as if they had been set there just for

his sake. In no other book can he find words to equal them, nor better words.”—Martin Luther, *Martin Luther: Selections From His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor Books, 1962), pp. 39, 40.

To experience the life-transforming power of the Psalms, we are called to sing and pray them as did the generations of believers who have used the Psalms to pour out their praises, petitions, confessions, laments, and thanksgiving to the sovereign God of grace and justice.

Do we need to *study* the Psalms, then? Like the rest of the Scriptures, the Psalms were written in their distinctive historical, theological, and literary contexts. The task of the study of the Psalms is to bring the particular world of the Psalms closer to the modern audience. We must note that while the Psalms are prayers of God’s people and even prayers that Jesus prayed as the incarnated Lord, the Psalms are also prayers about Jesus. They are God’s revelation to humanity. Another task of the study of the Psalms is, thus, to learn from the Psalms about all that God did, does, and will do for the world in and through Jesus Christ.

Although the Psalms are a collection of 150 poems, the collection may not be as random as it appears. The Psalms bear witness to a spiritual journey that is common to many of God’s children. The journey begins with a faith that is firmly established and secured by God’s sovereign rule and where good gets rewarded and evil punished. As we progress through our study, we will see what happens when the well-ordered world of faith is challenged and threatened by evil. Does God still reign? How can believers sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?

Our desire and prayer are that the Psalms strengthen us on our life journey, and through them we get to meet God daily, heart to heart, until the day when we see Jesus Christ face to face.

The Psalms bear witness to a spiritual journey that is common to many of God’s children.

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How to Use This Teachers Edition

“The true teacher is not content with dull thoughts, an indolent mind, or a loose memory. He constantly seeks higher attainments and better methods. His life is one of continual growth. In the work of such a teacher there is a freshness, a quickening power, that awakens and inspires his [class].”

—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 103.

To be a Sabbath School teacher is both a privilege and a responsibility. A privilege because it offers the teacher the unique opportunity to lead and guide in the study and discussion of the week’s lesson so as to enable the class to have both a personal appreciation for God’s Word and a collective experience of spiritual fellowship with class members. When the class concludes, members should leave with a sense of having tasted the goodness of God’s Word and having been strengthened by its enduring power. The responsibility of teaching demands that the teacher is fully aware of the Scripture to be studied, the flow of the lesson through the week, the interlinking of the lessons to the theme of the quarter, and the lesson’s application to life and witness.

This guide is to help teachers to fulfill their responsibility adequately. It has three segments:

- 1. Overview** introduces the lesson topic, key texts, links with the previous lesson, and the lesson’s theme. This segment deals with such questions as Why is this lesson important? What does the Bible say about this subject? What are some major themes covered in the lesson? How does this subject affect my personal life?
- 2. Commentary** is the chief segment in the Teachers Edition. It may have two or more sections, each one dealing with the theme introduced in the Overview segment. The Commentary may include several in-depth discussions that enlarge the themes outlined in the Overview. The Commentary provides an in-depth study of the themes and offers scriptural, exegetic, illustrative discussion material that leads to a better understanding of the themes. The Commentary also may have scriptural word study or exegesis appropriate to the lesson. On a participatory mode, the Commentary segment may have discussion leads, illustrations appropriate to the study, and thought questions.
- 3. Life Application** is the final segment of the Teachers Edition for each lesson. This section leads the class to discuss what was presented in the Commentary segment as it impacts Christian life. The application may involve discussion, further probing of what the lesson under study is all about, or perhaps personal testimony on how one may feel the impact of the lesson on one’s life.

Final thought: What is mentioned above is only suggestive of the many possibilities available for presenting the lesson and is not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive in its scope. Teaching should not become monotonous, repetitious, or speculative. Good Sabbath School teaching should be Bible-based, Christ-centered, faith-strengthening, and fellowship-building.