

Salt and Light Institute: Summer 2009 Elective

The Movement and Message of the Book of Psalms

By Andy Witt, ThM

Description:

Throughout Church history the book of Psalms has been a constant – no matter what culture, nation, or denomination. Many of us are well acquainted with the psalms as God’s prayer and worship guide in our own devotional lives. The Church, it seems, has *always* used the book of Psalms in this way. We sing the psalms, pray the psalms, memorize the psalms, and encourage one another with the psalms. But as important as this aspect of the Psalter is, there is another side of the book that many of us have most likely never considered; namely, that this is a *book* of Psalms. In other words, all these psalms come together into a larger Text called the Book. Could the book be pointing us in a direction that might help us to understand each individual psalm better? It is this other side of the Psalter that will be our focus. In short, my goal for this class is familiarize you with what has been called a “compositional approach” to the Psalms.

The theological aspect of our approach will keep in view the practical use of the Psalms that we are all familiar with. Its focus is on picking out the major themes of the psalms, the common language from psalm-to-psalm, and learning how to complain to and praise the God who created and redeemed us, yet sometimes feels so distant from us. The theological aspect tells us that God is there, no matter how we feel, and that his presence means we still have hope, if we would but trust in God and his promises. The compositional aspect will keep us in tune with how God is speaking to us through this great book. The Psalter is much more than a hymn book of ancient Israel, or a prayer guide for the Church. It is a prophetic book, structured and arranged by an editor who was moved by God to deliver God’s message to us. Each psalm fits together into a masterpiece, like a stain-glassed window. To only look at the individual psalms would be to miss something special God has in store for us. Thus, we want to keep both of the aspects in view: with one hand we investigate how the Psalter becomes our words to God, and with the other we consider how words from men have become God’s words to us.

Class	Topics Covered	Reading for that Class
1	A Glimpse Back, A Vision Forward Current Trends, What is a Psalm?, The <i>who, what where, when, and why</i> of the Psalms, A look at the combo of prophecy, theology, and music in the OT	Weekly HW: Psalm Journal – write down things that have struck you, how Psalms lead into one another, common themes and words, etc.
2	Puzzles and Box-tops: Piecing the Psalter Together The final editor, the shape of the Psalter, looking at the seams of the Psalter (ps. 1-2, 146-150, 41, 72, 89, 106)	Book One of Psalter (1-41), especially psalms 1-2 and how common words and themes link them together
3	The Movement of the Book (Books I-II) Psalms 1-2, Psalm 72, Psalm 3-8 as a Test-Case, Delving into Lament and Praise	Book Two of Psalter (42-72), especially how psalms 2 and 72 are similar
4	The Movement of the Book (Books III-IV) How do Psalms 73-106 develop the book further?	Books 3 and 4 of Psalter (73-106), how do psalms 73/90 answer 72/89?
5	The Movement (Book V) and Message of the Book How Psalms 107-150 finish the book, and a look into what the book means as a whole Book	Book Five of Psalter (107-150), how are psalms 107 and 145 similar?

For resources and printable handouts, recordings, etc., go to: www.andywittonline.com and click on the link for “Salt and Light Institute” near the top-left part of the page.