

## The Book of Psalms – Week Four – Books 3 and 4 Andy Witt

### Teaching Notes

#### *Last Week*

I began the lesson tonight by quoting from two authors as a way to recap from last week, as well as to bridge the gap between Books I-II and III-IV. The first was a quote from James Mays which helped to illustrate that the psalms from books I-II can be to both inspire our own faith journey (as we pray *with* and *like* David) and to teach us theology (we trust in God *because of* David and *through* David). That is, in these psalms there is a dimension which helps to identify with David and imitate his own trust in the Lord, as well as a dimension which shows us that there is a David-to-come because of whom and through him we are able to have a personal relationship with the Lord. The quote also spoke to the idea that the reign of God is directly connected to the destiny of David. This idea will rear its head as we study Books III-IV, but it will be enough to say that God's faithfulness to his covenant with David will either make or break the prophet's case for faith in the Lord. That is, if God is not faithful to David, then God is not who he says he is.

The second quote we looked at was from a prominent evangelical scholar, John Sailhamer. He said that the past was the divine canvas on which God painted his plans for the future. This quote is helpful for us because it helps us understand that as we read about things that have happened in the history of Israel, the purpose of the Bible is not necessarily to tell us about those past things. It could be, and usually is the case, that these historical events tell us something about the future so as to inspire our present faith. Thus, in the Psalter, we have an intermixing of pictures from David that help us to not only learn about his faith amidst turmoil, but also about what is going to happen to the Anointed Davidic king and what his faith is going to look like.

#### *The End of Book II: Psalm 72*

As the end of book II in the Psalter, it is without saying that this psalm is significant and is placed at a very important place in the book as a whole. Many scholars have noted the affinities of Psalm 72 with Psalms 1-2, as well as other OT texts, such as Deuteronomy 17, 1 Kings 3, and Daniel 7. Within the Psalter, it restates many of the promises from Psalm 2 while also recognizing that the promise did not come to fruition in Solomon, since the title notes that Solomon wrote it (though this may be disputed). What have in this psalm, then, is a poem which asks God to bring about the messianic kingdom promised in 2 Samuel 7, as well as anoint his king over that kingdom. The psalm ends with an editorial note that this psalm, combined with all the other psalms of David, collectively serve to give us insight into what it means to have a heart after God's own. The note does not mean that the prayers of David have stopped (which could be implied by 'ended'), but have come to a culmination or fulfillment. This prayer of Solomon, then, proves to summarize the heights of David's heart concerning the promises of God. So ends book II.

## *The Significance of Books III-IV*

Book III begins on the heels of these grand Davidic thoughts. So where does the Psalter take us from here? The books which follow take us to an unexpected place – from calling us to praise the Lord who reigns in Zion forever to questioning the very idea that God will ever fulfill his covenant promises to David.

*Book III.* Several themes are consistently reiterated in Book III. One of them is asking God questions of “how long?” and “why?”. This book clearly shows us that Israelite disobedience is the cause of God’s anger, but it also affirms the validity and certainty of a future restoration in Israel in accord with that kingdom described in Psalm 72. On top of this, this book is filled with pleas and complaints from both an individual from Israel and the community of Israel. The interesting development is that the voice of the individual in the book looks a lot like the righteous king we’ve seen throughout books I-II. This individual certainly suffers alongside the nation, but at the same time he stands apart from them through his trust in the Lord and righteous conduct. In fact, by the end of book III, this ‘son of man’ is brought into death’s domain by the wrath of God (Ps 88; 89.38ff), even though his kingdom and throne are promised into the future (89.1-37).

*Book IV.* This book begins by responding to the how long and why questions of Book III. It says that God’s timing is different than man’s, and that God will continue to reign from Zion. It would be wise for his servants to continue to seek refuge in him and wait for the messianic kingdom to come. To drive this point home, Psalm 92 focuses on the anointing of this king (92.10) as well as the blessing of the righteous (92.11ff), before spending several psalms describing the reign of the Lord (Pss 93-100). Significantly, the kingdom over which the Lord resides in these psalms is virtually indistinguishable from the Davidic, messianic kingdom described in 72 and referred to throughout book III. Book IV ends with several psalms illustrating faith under the reign of God (101-103) as well as the greatness of the God under whom they serve (104-105). The final psalm in book IV focuses on the gathering in of the Israelites from exile (106).

## *Following the Collection of Psalms*

Rather than doing a full-blown overview of each psalm, I’m going to bullet point several aspects of some of the psalms in each book to give you an idea of how I arrived at the summaries above:

### Book III:

- **Psalm 73.** This psalm begins by responding to the promise of a just and peaceful kingdom in Psalm 72; instead of the situation of 72, the exact opposite is happening, to the point that the people of God have joined the wicked.
- **Psalm 74.** The community laments that the temple and the city have been destroyed; they identify themselves with the wicked of 73, and take on the judgment of 73; they still question

how long and why, but also call for the conditions of 72 to come. Note the change in voice starting in 74.12 ('my God')

- **Psalm 75.** A divine response to the community's questions from 74; a time of righteous judgment has been reserved, and peace will be established; this time is in the future and is unspecified. Judgment will come to all the wicked, whether from Israel or not.
- **Psalm 76.** Another divine response to 74, this time describing the final conflict to establish the universal kingdom of 72; The God who dwells in Zion will bring about this kingdom, a worldwide capital, a restored and more lofty Zion of the future.
- **Psalm 77.** How long will God's anger continue? The psalmist remembers the past deeds of God, unlike the nation his is a part of. This helps him in his search to answer several key questions for continued hope in God.
- **Psalm 78.** Gives a divine answer to 77, bringing up the continual sin throughout Israel's history that has always resulted in the judgment of God; the speaker of 77 becomes the spokesman for God in 78.1-8, and his piety is parallel to that of David in 78.68-69; his faithful conduct is contrasted with the nation in much the same way as in 73, and his poem is directed to all the people (78.1)
- **Psalm 79.** Similar to 74, this is a communal lament asking how long and why the suffering persists; the speakers of 79 declare their faithfulness in contrast to the nation of 78 (c.f. 79.8, 13); they plea for mercy in 79 on the basis of the promises in 78:1-8, and commit to obedience.
- **Psalm 80.** Continues in the same vein as 79, asking how long and why; the people have asked for forgiveness, and view their current situation as that of the exodus; in the end they ask for God to establish his king – this repeats the same trend in psalm 78, where the exodus was followed by the establishment of David.
- **Psalm 81.** A divine response to 80 calling Israel to celebrate in festival precisely what they had failed to do in psalm 78; the speaker in the first half of 81 appears to be a member of this community; Yhwh speaks in the second half and accuses the nation of disobedience; if they had obeyed God, their enemies would have been quickly subdued.
- **Psalm 82.** Another divine response to Israel; It is Israel's own leaders and judges who exalt the wicked (like 73); now God is asking them how long they will disobey and be wicked; he wants Israel's leaders to display the leadership of the king from 72, rather than causing judgment to continue in Israel.
- **Psalm 83.** The final psalm in the Asaph collection (73-83), this is a psalm of lament asking for God to judge the nations; significantly, they do not want the nations to be utterly destroyed (as in 74), but desire that their judgment end in their knowing God and seeking after his name.
- **Psalm 84.** Describes the righteous individual and nation who walk in integrity, as apposed to the wicked 'walk' of 81-83; the destination of the righteous is Zion, promised in 76, 78, and 87; the walk of 84 also happens in 85-86 and ends up in Zion in 87. This seems to fulfill the call to celebrate in festival from psalm 81.
- **Psalm 85.** The nation joins the prayer of 84 in the first half of 85; the second half of 85 is the voice of Yhwh, promising the conditions of 72.
- **Psalm 86.** This is the prayer of the righteous one of 85, who will lead the nation as in 72; the prayer of 1-7 is answered in 8-13, as the establishment of 72 and the rescue out of death (this death is chronicled in 88)
- **Psalm 87.** This psalm represents the fulfillment of the promise of 86 to establish the messianic kingdom in Zion. Even Babylon and Assyria will pay tribute to Zion.

- **Psalm 88.** Ends on a hopeless note in the realms of death, far from the situation in 87; the prayer is from a Davidic king out of Sheol. It corresponds well with the 'but' statement in psalm 89.38ff.
- **Psalm 89.** The dead of 88, including the speaker and many others, will arise eventually and praise God for the eternal covenant with David; 89.2-19 specifically answers the interrogatives of 88; the death of 88 did not silence this One. Importantly, the kingdom promised to the king in 89.20-38 is equated with the one ruled by Yhwh in 2-19; an eternal life is required of such a king; Book III ends by asking who such an immortal could be and when he would appear; this means the man of 86 and 89 has not appeared yet.

#### Book IV:

- **Psalm 90.** This psalm responds directly to the how long and to whom questions of book III; from God's perspective, thousands of years are but a breath; we also learn that the exile is the result of Israel's sin and disobedience (90.7-8; 106.6-42); the author of the psalm was surrounded by a generation dying in futility; the brevity of life in v1-6 is a result of divine wrath (7-12), which is hopefully going to be redeemed in the future (13-17); the psalm intentionally evokes the cry of the wilderness generation, dying in futility under God's curse for unbelief.
- **Psalm 91.** Interestingly, this psalm was used to invoke divine protection, especially demonic, at Qumran, with later Rabbinic texts calling it 'song of the demons' and 'song of demoniacs'; its use of Jesus in the Gospels brings together wilderness, exile, and demons; theme = God will protect his faithful one banished in the desert from every demonic attack; but who is 91.1 talking about? It could be the stricken and pierced king of 89, who even in his afflicted state will receive divine protection from all evils.
- **Psalm 92.** The psalm has the tone of a victory song; but whose? The resurgence of the stricken king (89; 91), perhaps, which would interpret the psalms as messianic.
- **Psalm 93.** Initiates a group from 93-100; 93-94 introduce, 95&100 bracket, 96-99 form its heart; these psalms all point to God's eschatological reign, anticipating 110.
- **Psalm 94.** Exile among hostile nations is envisaged here; Israel is perplexed by God's actions (v8), but know that God will discipline those who wish it, but will ultimately avenge those who fight against his inheritance.
- **Psalms 95-100.** All of these comment further on the reign of God.
- **Psalm 101.** A call to integrity among the people of God. Since this is a Davidic psalm, we could be hearing the voice of the future Davidic king. A case could be made, though, for the historic David as an example of present faith in the exile.
- **Psalm 102-106.** See notes above in summary.

Note that Old Testament scholar David Mitchell surmises that Book IV represents the Exile, divided into 90-100 and 101-106. This further divides into 90-92, 93-100, 101-106, with psalms 96-99 at the center. The 'Moses' theme starts in 90.1, mentioned by name seven times (90.1; 99.6; 103.7; 105.26; 106.16, 23, 32). The 'wilderness' theme is also important, looking back to the wilderness of Moses to gain a perspective on the present Exilic wilderness.

Also note that ancient Jewish interpretation considers almost every psalm from 84-100 as referring in some sense to the restoration of the Davidic kingdom in the messianic age. This especially applies to psalms 84-89 and 92-100.