

The Psalms by Lyndon Jackson

Written 1000 years before his birth, Jesus pointed to the importance of the Psalms, telling certain disciples after his resurrection "These are the words that I spoke unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the Law of Moses, and in the prophets and in the Psalms concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures." Luke 24:36-45 In this collection of 150 musical poems, the Lord Jesus himself indicated that we can expect to read about his mission and the saving work he performed. Thus the Psalms record more than just principles for meditation reflection, but more importantly, the Psalms reveal gods purpose in his son and the way in which eternal salvation can be obtained.

Often referred to as "The Psalms of David" the titles of the Psalms are not necessarily an indication of authorship, as the words "of," "for" and "to" have a very similar meaning in the Hebrew language, therefore a Psalm "of" David may have been one he had written himself, or that was written "to" David or even dedicated "for" David. However the Titles are very ancient and the natural presumption is that they indicate authorship, sticking to the age-old universal and unbroken tradition that David was indeed the principle author of the Psalms. So, we speak of the Psalms as "The Psalms of David" because he was the principle writer, or compiler. It is generally accepted that few of the Psalms were in existence before David's time, and they formed a base for hymn worship. This was greatly enlarged when David arrived, getting added to from generation to generation and finally thought to be completed in its present form by Ezra. As said just before, the Psalms were written as musical poems, as songs to be sung. The type of instruments around at this time were stringed instruments like that of the harp and psaltery; wind instruments such as the flute, pipe horn, trumpet; and also beaten instruments such as the timbrel and cymbal. And as we read of in 1 Chronicles 23:5 David had an Orchestra of 4,000 people, for which he made all of the instruments.

Of the 150 Psalms, 73 of them were written by David - some no doubt, dedicated to him as king, some he collected, and without a doubt some he actually wrote, given the fact that he was a gifted poet and musician as we see in 1st Samuel 16:17-23 and 1st Chronicles 25:1-8. The rest of the Psalms were written, 12 by Asaph, 11 to the sons of Korah, 2 to Solomon (72, 127), 1 to Moses (90), 1 to Ethan (89), and 50 are anonymous

The Hebrew bible divides these 150 Psalms into 5 books, which reveal important stages of personal redemption, and each book ending in a song of praise. In fact, in bible numerics the number 5 indicates the principles of "grace" (or favour), as might be demonstrated by an open hand with its 5 fingers extended to help. This "grace", or help, is seen in the work accomplished by the Lord Jesus for all of those he will save.

Let's now look at these 5 books separately...

The First Book of the Psalms - Psalms 1-41

This section of the Psalms corresponds to the theme of Genesis, the first book of Moses, and draws heavily upon the record of Creation. The Opening chapters of the Bible reveal that God created heaven and earth. They speak of

- The joy and blessedness of the paradise formed in Eden;
- The failure of man to uphold the divine commandments;
- The condemnation that came upon those who transgress His laws. Yet there is a promise of forgiveness through the sacrifice of a lamb:
- The covenant of promise established through the actions of such as faithful Abraham, and the blessings that come upon all nations as a result.

All this is contained in the book of Genesis and is reflected in the first book of Psalms.

As the book of Genesis introduces Adam, the first man created, so the first section of the Psalms highlights a remarkable man. He is, however, different from Adam who brought sin and death through his disobedience. Instead this man is unique, bringing righteousness and life through his obedience.

Psalm 1 presents a "righteous man" (v.6) who is seen to be "blessed," a word which means to be "very happy." It speaks of the happiness of a man who walks a perfect course through life, avoiding the association of sinners and ungodly people. Only one man has been able to experience this happiness in a complete sense: the Lord Jesus Christ, the sinless son of God. He is the man brought to attention in this opening Psalm. Through righteousness, he restores that which Adam lost in the beginning: favour and harmony with God.

But the sinless and obedient life revealed by Jesus of Nazareth in his ministry to the people over 19 centuries ago, was rejected by a generation that preferred the evil and godless ways common to us all. And instead of seeking the salvation offered by the Lord Jesus, they took him and crucified him. The Psalms capture the

drama of these experiences in intense prophetic pictures. Psalm 22 shows that before the Lord would prevail over his enemies, he was brought into "the dust of the earth" (v. 15), when his tormentors, putting him on a cross of shame, "pierced his hands and feet" (v.16). Afterwards he was placed in a tomb "cut out in the rock" (Matthew 27:60). But the Roman soldiers and Jewish religious leaders who put him on the cross were unable to prevent his resurrection. God brought His Son from the grave, as Psalm 18 describes: "He brought me forth also into a large place. He delivered me because He delighted in me. The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath He recompensed me" (vs. 19-20).

Jesus endured the pain and the shame of the cross because of "the joy that was set before him" (Hebrews 12:2). Psalm 22 illustrates that joy. It depicts two stages in the Lord's work for salvation. The first picture is of a company of people who would be redeemed by his shed blood: "I will declare Thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee" (v. 22). The Lord looked beyond the suffering, seeing himself ultimately as surrounded, not by Gentile "dogs" (v.16), which describes most of those at the foot of the cross, but by a company of faithful men and women, the outcome of his work of salvation he accomplished at his first advent. The second picture portrays his return to earth at the time when he will establish a divine political kingdom and reign from Jerusalem in glory. So Psalm 22:25 declares: "My praise shall be of Thee in the great congregation." This will be centered in a glorious temple to be built on the hill of Zion, called "the House of Prayer for all Nations" (Isaiah 56:7) and described in Ezekiel chapters 40-48. Then "all the ends of the earth shall remember and turn unto the lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Thee" (Psalm 22:27). This is certainly not the case today. Instead, the world is filled with hatred and envy, with the violence of anger, and the ungodliness of a society without a conscience. But a dramatic change will occur when the Lord Jesus returns. Of that time the Bible declares: "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord. and from the glory of his power: when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10).

As the Lord was redeemed from the sin-nature he bore in common with all mankind, and glorified with immortality after his resurrection, so can those who accept his teaching and identify with his sacrifice and resurrection. To do so, they must first recognize their fallen condition, as members of a race of sinners. We are born with an inclination to evil, and consequently become easily strayed from the way of right. Left to ourselves we would be destitute of all hope.

So Paul says that if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain: ye are yet in your sins. That is to say...without Christ, we have no hope. The Psalmist reflects this important teaching, by pointing to the happiness that comes from a proper recognition of our condition, and by seeking the way of redemption.

Psalm 32 opens with the words: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven. Whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and I whose spirit there is no guile." The person who enjoys full fellowship with God is certainly in a most happy (as the word "blessed" really means) condition. Notice that, in this verse there are two different classes mentioned. The first is that of a person forgiven; the latter of a man who has not sinned. The first describes the common lot of mankind, all of whom have fallen into sin and transgression; the latter applies only to one man: the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom was 'no guile' (1st Peter 2:22), being "without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). In the Psalm both Jesus Christ and the people he came to save, are joined together in "happiness."

The Second Book of the Psalms - Psalms 42-72

This book corresponds to Moses' book of Exodus, which means "These are the Names." In Exodus, Moses reveals the Name of Israel's God: the Hebrew Yahweh, which means: He Who Will Be Revealed in Those He Selects. When God brought His people from Egypt under the hand of Moses, He redeemed them from the oppression and persecution they experienced, and desired them to manifest His characteristics. The challenge of the book of Exodus is between two ways of life: that of God versus that of the Egypt. From the very beginning the challenge is presented: Will the God of Israel (Yahweh) or the God of Egypt (Pharaoh) prevail? When Moses asked Pharaoh to acknowledge the supremacy of the God of the Hebrews, he replied: "Who is the Lord (Yahweh) that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I know not Yahweh, neither shall I let Israel go!" Believing in the superstitions of the gods of Egypt, he was ignorant of the divine will. So his power was ultimately destroyed in the waters of the Red Sea when they endeavoured to destroy the people of God. The same question presents itself today to people concerned with the pressures of life: Will the worship of materialism and human prowess, or that of divine revelation and wisdom prevail? Each individual must make that decision for himself. The second book of the Psalms outlines the great changes to come about when God's people are ultimately delivered from the power of sin and oppression. Psalm 72 commences: "Give the king thy judgments O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son. He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment." (vs. 1-2). This speaks of the divine theocracy of the future, when the kingdom of God will be established by His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, then, all the idols of Egypt, represented today in the teachings and ambitions of mankind, will be destroyed and God's way elevated.

The Third Book of the Psalms - Psalms 73-89

This third book emphasizes the next step along the way of righteousness: a reflection of the holiness of God in the life of the believer. The Hebrew title of Moses' third book, Leviticus, is "And He called," emphasizing that God calls His people to dedication. The book of Leviticus outlines the sacrifices and offerings required of the

nation. Israel was told that they could only approach God upon the basis of consistent sacrifices, which had to be presented by an appointed priesthood. This points to the sacrifice of Jesus of Nazareth, whose offering of his life to God was acceptable because he was sinless, and perfectly obedient to his Father's will. Now the Lord Jesus Christ has been elevated to the position of "high priest" to plead on behalf of those who desire to have fellowship with God. These principles are contained in this third book of the Psalms. Psalm 89 introduces us to two "holy ones." One of these is God Himself (v.18); the other is His Son, Jesus Christ termed "Thy (God's) holy one" (v.19). Of his Son, God declared in v. 19: "I have laid help upon one that is mighty." Acts 13:22 identifies Jesus Christ as the one described. Jesus Christ was the "mighty one" who came by the power of God in the virgin-birth reported in the opening chapters of the Gospel records and described as the "Son of God." There is an important reason why Jesus had to be uniquely begotten: he had a remarkable and mighty work to perform, that required one specially strengthened to overcome. From his mother, Mary, Jesus inherited the flesh and blood nature that we all share, with its sinful propensities and characteristics that incline towards evil. From his Father, Almighty God, he inherited a disposition towards righteousness. Because of this twofold aspect inherited through his unique birth, Jesus experienced a tremendous conflict. His nature, like ours, sought for personal gratification: his mind, like his Father's, presented an opposition to sin (Hebrews 5:7). Within this contest of flesh versus Spirit, he displayed an attitude which his Father described as "mighty" (Psalm 89:19). Therefore, of necessity, the Lord Jesus was strengthened beyond what is required of us, because he faced the enormous task of achieving a perfectly obedient life in order to be the Saviour of mankind and no other man has ever been called upon to perform such a tremendous, and difficult, task.

The Fourth Book of the Psalms - Psalms 90-106

The fourth section of the Psalms represents that of the book of Numbers, which is appropriately named "In the Wilderness." It presents the experiences of Moses and those with him in the wilderness when he brought Israel out of Egypt and led them towards the Promised Land. The opening Psalm describes itself as "a prayer of Moses the man of God" (Psalm 90).

It contrasts the eternity of God, who is from everlasting to everlasting, with the brevity of man's life. In verse 10 of that Psalm Moses describes mortal existence as "threescore years and ten." He saw himself surrounded by mortality and death. As he struggled to bring the people to the land of freedom, he experienced continuing incidents of failure, weakness and death, as the people fell prey to the harsh conditions of the wilderness through lack of faith. Nevertheless, he knew that God is merciful and had initiated salvation for His people (v. 14). In the midst of the evidence of death, Moses prayed for everlasting life (v. 17). He knew that "the work of our hands" seen in the tabernacle the people built in the wilderness under the instruction of God, was in fact, a grand prophecy of the coming redemption through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Moses knew that sin - when it is forgiven - is no bar to the kingdom of God. So he prays for "mercy" (v.14), in order that the people "may rejoice and be glad all our days." Forgiveness of sins is possible upon an acknowledgement of what God requires of His people, when a full and open confession is made, and a resolution to avoid the pathway of evil and folly in the future. So the apostle John teaches that if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1st John 1:9).

This is the meaning of true baptism as taught in the Bible. After a confession of belief, a full immersion under water is required, as shown in the example of Jesus himself (see Mark 1:10). The ritual expresses the commitment of the person submitting to this important act that they will follow its principles in life. Baptism identifies with the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, by which he challenged sin in all its aspects, and overcame its power (Romans 6:3-4). Symbolically, in baptism a person is "covered" by his atoning work, and rises from the water to demonstrate a "resurrection" to a new life of dedication to God. In this status, the believer has access to "fervent prayer" (James 5:16), by which forgiveness of sins is obtained, and fellowship with God is upheld. That is why Psalm 106 is a prayer for deliverance: "Remember me, O Lord, with the favor that thou bearest unto Thy people: O visit me with thy salvation." (v.4). These words teach that the people of God are those to whom He shows favour. That favour is in an understanding of His Word of Truth, the provision of His Son for their personal salvation and the opportunity for forgiveness of sins. But soon there is to be a greater moment when God's people will be "visited with salvation." When the Lord Jesus returns again from heaven (see Acts 1:11), God's favour will be shown in a literal and practical manner. The nation of Israel will be restored, and its journey through the "wilderness" of exile amongst the nations will end. We see a token of that in the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. This conforms exactly to the prophecy of Jesus given to his disciples, when he said of the Jewish people who rejected him in AD30, that "they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." (Luke 21:24). That the people and city are no longer so persecuted as in former times, indicates that the day of their full redemption is at hand. So Psalm 106 continues: "That I may see the good of Thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of Thy nation, that I may glory with Thine inheritance" (v. 5). This must be the attitude of people who desire to please Almighty God.

But notice a further important point in that Psalm. As it continues to review Israel's failure to understand the reason for its wandering through the wilderness under the leadership of Moses, the Psalm highlights the tragic mistake of the people: "But they were mingled among the nations, and learned their works" (v.35). This is a salutary warning! Israel grieved God because they idolised the works and religions of the nations around them; the people gave themselves over to enjoying the way of life of a society that was abhorrent to God.

People of faith will stand apart from such a way. The apostle John urges: "love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1st John 2:15). "The world" spoken of here defines the religious and humanistic teachings and ungodly ways of a society, which opposes His Truth. As disciples of Christ, we must abstain from involvement in the doctrines and principles of a society that is soon to be removed in the impending divine judgments.

The Fifth Book of the Psalms - Psalms 107-145

The last book of the Psalms reflects the principles of the final book of Moses. Entitled "These are the Words," the book of Deuteronomy represents that One would come as the "Word made flesh" (John 1:14), being the moral manifestation of God in human nature (1 Timothy 3:16). This was fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Deuteronomy describes the overall purpose of God leading His people through a place of trial, in order to bring them to His chosen place of redemption. It speaks of the way in which God brought restoration to the weary nation that struggled through the wilderness.

So it depicts the end in view: the nation established safely in the Promised Land. In fact, twenty-two times reference is made to "the place, which the Lord hath chosen," emphasizing the locality where Israel would find peace and happiness. God selected the land of Canaan (today known as Israel) and the city of Jerusalem as the place of their restoration. Later, the prophet Jeremiah spoke in clear, unmistakable words about the place God will yet elevate above all cities throughout the earth when His Son returns: "At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord: and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart" (ch. 3:17). Psalm 107:7 records the march of the Jewish people through the wilderness, in order that they might enter into their appointed place of safety: "He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation." Ultimately, in the days of king David, their capital was established in Jerusalem - but the people again neglected their spiritual responsibilities and were banished amongst the nations, whose ways they desired so much.

But the record of their failure does not imply that God has forgotten His purpose.

Not at all. The Psalm says that God "sent His word and healed them" (v.20). This was done in a way unexpected by the people of Israel. The Scriptures declare that God "sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law, to redeem them that are under the Law" (Galatians 4:4). Jesus Christ was the perfect manifestation of the Word of God. In fact, the apostle John declares that "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). This shows that the Word of God was revealed in His Son, and we are invited to experience the healing power of his teachings. It was this man, Jesus, the Son of God, who stilled the stormy waters of the Lake of Galilee on one occasion (see Psalm 107:29) - demonstrating his ability to calm the troubles and pressures of life, which seem to engulf his people.

But the greatest healing process will commence when the Lord Jesus Christ returns to earth from heaven. With divine power, he will bring about remarkable changes in society. He will remove governments that encourage violence: refuse the policies that only elevate flesh: instruct all peoples in the principles that will bring harmony and goodwill to the world.

Psalm 145 speaks of this coming time of grandeur and joy. This psalm could well be called the National Anthem of the coming Kingdom of God on earth, for it expresses words that will be on everyone's heart and lips in the day when that kingdom is established on earth.

The first verse extols the presence of the Lord "for ever and ever," and then sweeps on to the dramatic changes that will come upon the whole earth, as all peoples honour the king who will then reign in Jerusalem. "I will speak... of the glorious honour of Thy majesty... of Thy wondrous works... Thy terrible acts... Thy greatness... abundantly utter...shall sing" (read carefully all of verses 5-7).

In those days a proper system of education will exist, as people learn to read their Bibles and listen to the teachings of the One who not only created in the beginning, but who will then re-create His glory upon the earth: "they shall speak of the glory of Thy kingdom and talk of thy power."

This amazing scene, so unlike the present, is described by the prophet Isaiah: "it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills: and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say. Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (ch. 2:2-3).

A new system of justice will be introduced. Instead of jurisdiction being based upon fabricated evidence and the clever presentations of expensive experts in law, the injured and distressed will be properly assisted. The great king and his immortal associates in that day will be able to examine the hearts and minds of their subjects, so that proper justice will be meted out: "The Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down" (Psalm 145:14).

The vital needs of mankind will be addressed. No longer will famine and pestilence stalk the earth through the maladministration of men, but every care will be given: "the eyes of all look unto Thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." (vs. 15-16).

War and violence will be abolished in that day: "The Lord preserveth all them that love him, but all the wicked will He destroy" (v.20). No longer will greed and ambition be elevated as the aim of life, but the divine principles of mercy and loving kindness will replace the present evil heart so evident in the affairs of the nations.

No wonder the Psalm concludes with a personal expression of joy and satisfaction: "My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord: and let all flesh bless his holy name forever and ever" (v. 21). But if all mankind is to do this in the future, when the kingdom of God is established on the earth, should not individuals who desire to please God do so today?

In fact, the Bible invites men and women to respond faithfully to His appeal, and to endeavour to reveal these qualities in life now. The apostle Peter teaches that "God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name" (Acts 15:14). This is the very purpose of the gospel message. God's kingdom will be established at "the set time" (Psalm 102:13) determined by Him. Paul adds that God "hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

But before that day arrives, God urges men and women to separate from the ways of society about them, and devote themselves to developing His characteristics. To such He speaks as a Father: "Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing: and I will receive you. And will be a Father unto you and ye shall be my sons and daughters saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:17-18).

The Bible describes our present experiences as a wilderness probation, which provides the opportunity to reveal our worthiness in the eyes of Almighty God. He invites us to follow His teachings now, that we might enjoy full fellowship with Him in the day of His salvation, and when He has established the throne of His glory in Jerusalem. The way this is done is clearly revealed in the Scriptures (see Acts 2:38) and involves believing, obeying, being baptised into the sin-covering name of Jesus Christ, and associating with those of a kindred mind and a similar desire, so that together we are encouraged to continue faithfully until the appearing of our Lord from heaven.

All of these 5 books that I've just discussed provide us with a picture of steps for salvation, and I would just like to finish up with a brief summary of these steps...

A Picture of the First Step to Salvation.

The first book of the Psalms presents the first stage of redemption. An individual must be prepared to acknowledge sin, and accept the terms of salvation - the crucifixion of one's own desires in order to serve Almighty God. This comes from the reading and understanding of His creative Word of Life: the Bible.

The Second Step to Salvation.

This is seen in the principle of baptism taught in the Scriptures. As the Israelites were saved from the power of the Egyptians through the crossing of the Red Sea (described in the second book of the Bible), so believers are introduced to the way of righteousness through baptism. Baptism is a full immersion in water, by which the former way of life is figuratively destroyed and the believer walks "in newness of life" (see Paul's explanation in Romans 6, and write for a copy of the booklet. Baptism: Essential for Salvation).

The Third Step to Salvation.

After learning the principles of godliness (Book 1), and responding in the obedience of baptism (Book 2), the believer now must follow holiness in life, separating from a godless society, and seeking to please the Father in actions of faithfulness.

The Fourth Step to Salvation.

Thus, the fourth step in the walk of salvation is to reveal the confidence of Hope: knowing that God will lead those who are faithful to triumph over difficulties, and to develop faith and trust.

The Fifth Step to Salvation.

This is to have a clear understanding of what God proposes for this world. To believe that Christ is coming and will reign on earth, and to seek harmony in truth with the Bible today, by believing and obeying its vital message.