

The Wisdom Literature

Lesson #5

Psalms Of God

Introduction

- Though all of the psalms extol the virtue of God, those that are included in this classification seem to have the great attributes of God as their theme.
- Hailey includes 17 psalms in this category (11, 12, 16, 23, 34, 46, 50, 62, 63, 81, 90, 97, 104, 115, 135, 139) and perhaps more could be added to this listing. In this lesson we will take a close look at three of these psalms.

Psalm 23

- Ron Edwards wrote, "The few verses which compose this psalm, if erased, would leave but a tiny blank in the pages of our Bible. However, if the sentiments expressed were deleted from life they would leave an unfillable hole in the human heart. The hungry heart would find no food; the lost heart, no direction; and the dying heart, no hope. Fortunately, it has not been deleted and for every man who knows the Lord as Shepherd, he shall not lack in any way" (Christianity Magazine, 1994, p. 966).
- The picture in this psalm is that of the shepherd and his flock. Such a shepherd knows each sheep by name. The shepherd goes before the sheep and makes sure they are not walking into danger (cf. John 10:27-28). The sheep never need worry when they follow the shepherd, for He will protect them and provide for them. God is that good Shepherd and His complete provision for His people is the clear theme of this psalm.
- The key to understanding the whole psalm is the phrase, "I shall not want."
 - "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures" -- I shall not lack provision.
 - "He leadeth me beside the still waters" -- I shall not lack peace.
 - "He restoreth my soul" -- I shall not lack restoration when I fail.
 - "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake" -- I shall not lack guidance.
 - "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me" -- I shall not lack courage.
 - "Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" -- I shall not lack true comfort.
 - "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies" -- I shall not lack protection, preservation and honor.

- "Thou anointest my head with oil" -- I shall never lack joy.
- "My cup runneth over" -- I shall never lack fullness of blessing.
- "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life" -- I shall not lack the Divine favor as long as I live on the earth.
- "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" -- I shall not lack a heavenly home when this life is over.
- Each of the seven Old Testament names for God, i.e., the definition for each name, is found in this psalm.
 - Jehovah-Jireh -- "The Lord will provide" (Genesis 22:13-14).
 - Jehovah-Rapha -- "The Lord will heal or restore" (Exodus 15:26).
 - Jehovah-Shalom -- "The Lord our peace" (Judges 6:24).
 - Jehovah-Tsidkenu -- "The Lord our righteousness" (Jeremiah 23:6).
 - Jehovah-Shammah -- "The Lord is there" (Ezekiel 48:35).
 - Jehovah-Nissi -- "The Lord our banner" (Exodus 17:8-15).
 - Jehovah-Raah -- "The Lord my shepherd" (Psalm 23:1).
- If the "Lord is my shepherd," all of these blessings are true and promised. Tragically, however, the Lord is not the shepherd of many. When the Lord is not the Good Shepherd of our lives then these abundant provisions are always missing. To be able to quote the Shepherd psalm is good, but to know the Shepherd is better.

Psalm 115

- Unbelievers have always asked, "Where is your God? What has He done for you lately?" False belief systems have arisen from the fertile ground of their unbelief. Men have sought to remake God in their own image and the result, to a lesser or greater extent, has been idolatry.
- Ancient Israel faced these questions and the problem of idolatry. God warned them sternly against succumbing to the seductive siren song of false religions (Exodus 20:4-5). This psalm is written to contrast the living God who made the world with idols made by the hands of men. It points out, by means of ridicule, the vanity of following an impotent idol (cf. 1 Kings 18:27; Isaiah 44:9-20; Jeremiah 10:1-16).
- Idols were not self-existent, eternal beings. Rather, they were the work of the hands of men.
 - They had mouths (vs. 5), but they could not communicate. These idols could make no promises or guide the behavior of their followers.
 - The idols had eyes (vs. 5), but they could not see the needs of their worshipers. God's eyes are upon His children, and He watches over them (Psalm 32:8; 1 Peter 3:12). Nothing is hidden from God's eyes, and He never sleeps. The man who trusts an idol has to watch over the idol; it cannot watch over itself (Judges 6:25-32).

- Idols have ears (vs. 6), but they cannot hear the prayers of their petitioners (cf. 1 Kings 18:26-29). God's ears are open and He hears when we call. He urges His children to call upon Him (1 Peter 5:7).
- Idols have noses, but they cannot smell (vs. 6). The point here being made seems to be that an idol cannot receive praise. When Noah built an altar and offered a burnt offering, "the Lord smelled a sweet savour" (Genesis 8:20-21). This was God's response to Noah's sacrifice of praise. A dead idol can never receive a sacrifice or respond to worship and praise.
- An idol has hands (vs. 7), but has no power to help his worshipers. God's arm is strong and His hand mighty (Psalm 89:13). His good hand was upon Ezra (7:6, 9, 28) and Nehemiah (1:10; 2:8, 18).
- Finally, idols have feet (vs. 7), but they have no presence among their followers. The worshiper must come to the idol; in fact, he must carry the idol (Jeremiah 10:5). Instead of carrying men's burdens, the false God is a burden (Isaiah 45:1-7). Jehovah goes with us in every situation (Matthew 28:20; Isaiah 41:10; Psalm 23:4).
- The practical impact of the contrast between God and idols needs to be clearly noted. Man becomes like what he worships -- "They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them" (vs. 8). It is reasonable that if one worships an impotent idol, when it comes to dealing with life's problems, he will be rendered as impotent as the god he worships. On the other hand, God is our help and shield and we can put our trust in Him (vs. 9; cf. Psalm 46:1-3; 121:2).
- God is mindful of man to bless him. He remembered Noah (Genesis 8:1), Abraham (Genesis 19:29), Rachel (Genesis 30:22), and Joseph (Genesis 42:9). When God makes promises to His people, He always keeps them (Psalm 11:5). Whether we are great or small, if we fear God and trust in Him, He will be mindful of us and work out His will in our lives. It is Jehovah who is, therefore, worthy of our blessing and praise (vs. 18). We should bless Him for who He is and what He has done.

Psalm 139

- What compels you to awe and wonder? What kind of things amaze you? Perhaps the first things that come to your mind are the mighty forces of nature -- the power of a tornado, the devastation of an earthquake, and the destruction of a flood. It could be the birth of a baby -- your baby! It could be a scene like the sun glistening against the majestic Grand Teton Mountains or while high in the Blue Ridge Mountains, watching the sun lay to the west and the smoke encircling the mountain peaks. These are awesome scenes.
- However, as we consider Psalm 139 and meditate upon the attributes of God, the awe that we feel over nature's scenes pales in comparison.

- God is omniscient (vss. 1-6).
 - The word omniscience means “all-knowing” and involves the ability to know whatever He chooses. David considered God’s knowledge in a very personal way. Five times in the psalm he referred to God knowing him (vss. 1, 2, 4, 23).
 - God knew David because He had searched the king. What did God know? He knew David’s heart (vs. 1; cf. 1 Samuel 13:14; 16:7); his thoughts (vs. 2); his actions (vs. 3); his words (vs. 4); and, his needs (vs. 5). David could only exclaim as he meditated upon his God that “such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it” (vs. 6).
- God is omnipresent (vss. 7-12).
 - The word omnipresent means “all-present” and affirms that God is everywhere He chooses. Is it possible to go to a place where you will not find God? Jonah attempted to flee from the presence of the Lord, only to discover that God was with him to bring him back to the place of obedience and service. Adam and Eve attempted to hide from God but failed (cf. Jeremiah 23:24).
 - God’s presence is expressed in four ways in this psalm.
 - The extreme of height (vs. 8).
 - The extreme of depth (vs. 8).
 - The extreme of direction (vss. 9-10).
 - The extreme of darkness (vss. 11-12).
 - The truth is, there was no place David could go and escape the all-seeing eye of God (Hebrews 4:13).
- God is omnipotent (vss. 13-18).
 - The word omnipotent means “all-powerful” and asserts that God has the power to do anything He chooses consistent with His own nature. David might have used God’s vast creation as an example of God’s great power; but, instead, he used childbirth.
 - Conception, development, and birth are perpetual wonders that an understanding of genetics, anatomy, and obstetrics cannot erase. God is the Author of life! This is not the impersonal blueprint of a distant engineer, but the loving plan of a gracious heavenly Father who made us as He wants us to be.
- God is judge (vss. 19-24).
 - Because He is all-knowing, ever-present and all-powerful, God also demands that man be accountable. Sin is a transgression of God’s law and His justice demands that sin be punished. David’s attitude as expressed in the words of this section is not born of personal malice or vindictiveness. The psalmist saw God’s enemies as his own enemies (cf. 139:20, 22) and prayed for their destruction. While it is good to say that we should hate sin and love the

sinner, we must confess that it is the sinful sinner who commits the sin.

- This section of the psalm speaks to the judgment of God. Man is quick to talk about God as a God of love, mercy, grace and forgiveness -- and He is certainly all of this and much more. Yet we must never forget that He is also a righteous judge (2 Corinthians 5:10). While we must meditate upon all of God's great attributes, let us never forget: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31).
- David closes Psalm 139 with a plea for God to search and know his heart and remove anything hurtful found there (vss. 23-24). What a wonderful picture of an open heart, a heart subject to God, a heart willing to make whatever changes necessary to please his Maker.

Conclusion

- Although we normally do not think of it, it is remarkable how much about the nature of God we learn from these psalms.
- Learning more about the nature of God can increase our confidence to approach His throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16).