

An Introduction to the Psalms

Lecture #2 “Thirteen Things to Remember” – March 3, 2021

(As per last time) 73 of the Psalms are attributed to David, and 13 of them are tied to specific incidents/episodes in his life. (Psalms 3, 7, 18, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, 142)

Note #1 - the superscriptions were added much later and may not be strictly accurate; but we are going to treat them as accurate. Note#2 - “maskil” = connected with teaching, “miktam” = a “golden psalm,” a meditative hymn of praise (the Septuagint translates the term “stela inscription” possibly meaning it was written on stone).

All but one of them have to do with escaping pursuit, entrapment, oppression. David’s career begins and ends in violence. Saul attempts to eliminate him in the beginning. Near the end, his own son, Absalom, gets himself declared king, raises an army, and attempts to kill him. Even later, another son by a different wife, Adonijah, tries the same thing!

Cross-reference the incident with the Psalm and the two passages will illuminate each other.

1 Samuel 18 David’s popularity & success; Saul’s jealousy. Saul promises Merab, but reneges. Offers Michal, but at the cost of 100 Philistine lives (a trap!). David kills 200, gets Michal, increases in popularity.

1 Samuel 19:11-17 Saul tries to kill David in his bed.

Psalm 59 – “Do Not Destroy” – preserve this Psalm!

David’s innocence/righteousness (v. 3). Almost the sense that an attack on David is an attack on God. God has a stake in defending David.

An element of vindictiveness – “Do not kill them (immediately)” (v.11) Let their defeat be slow, painful, a witness.

Note the names of God: O my God (1), O Lord (3), Lord God of Hosts (5), God of Israel (5), my strength (9), my fortress (9), our shield (11), a refuge (16), the God who shows me steadfast love (17) – and several are repeated.

Three voices: *They* howl like dogs, *God* laughs in derision (cf. Psalm 2), *David* sings.

The response of the one being pursued/hunted is to sing praises!

1 Samuel 24:1-7 (cf. 1 Sam. 26, as well) David could have killed Saul but didn’t.

“I will not raise my hand against the Lord’s anointed.”

Psalm 57 Our hymn (#5), *Be Exalted, O God* comes directly out of that moment of David’s

choosing to rely on God's protection r/t taking things into his own hands.
Other psalms from this period (of trusting God while being hunted by Saul) include 34, 52, 54, 56, 142.

Psalm 18 A Song of Deliverance "from the hand of *all his enemies* and from the hand of *Saul*. Originally composed in relation to Saul, but – presumably - David added to it over time. (Compare with Mary's *Magnificat* and Philip Brooks' *O Little Town of Bethlehem*.) The poet ponders an event, and perhaps years later finds words to express what he felt in the moment. The Psalm appears nearly intact in 2 Samuel 22 following a defeat of the Philistines near the end of David's career. (Note the confusion in chapter 21, where the killing of Goliath is attributed to Elhanan; 1 Chronicles 20 clarifies that Elhanan killed Lahmi, the *brother* of Goliath.) The language is hugely excessive, but this is what it *felt* like. David continues to proclaim his innocence/righteousness – cf. especially vs. 20-24.

Psalm 60 A *totally* different mood: acknowledgment of God's anger, need for restoration. Interestingly, this psalm comes out of a time of *victory*: the killing of the Edomites is detailed in 2 Samuel 8, seemingly implying that it was this plea for God's help and intervention that led to victory. There's a maturity here, a notable lack of the earlier presumption. The appeal is on the basis of God's promises, not David's innocence.

Psalm 6 Not specifically identified in superscription but seems to be from the same period. Just before David's sin with Bathsheba (which we will study next week), Note: the appeal here is not "my righteousness," but "your love." Not an appeal for justice but mercy.

2 Samuel 15-18 David's son, Absalom, tries to steal the kingdom away from him.
cf. Dorothy Law Noltes *Children Learn What they Live* (NYT guide to parenting.)

If a child lives with *criticism* he learns to *condemn*.

If a child lives with *hostility* he learns to *fight*.

If a child lives with *ridicule* he learns to *be shy*.

If a child lives with *shame* he learns to *feel guilty*.

If a child lives with *tolerance* he learns to *be patient*.

If a child lives with *encouragement* he learns to *have confidence*.

If a child lives with *praise* he learns to *appreciate*.

If a child lives with *fairness* he learns to show *justice*.

If a child lives with *security* he learns to *have faith*.

If a child lives with *approval* he learns to *like himself*.

If a child lives with *acceptance and friendship* he learns to *find love in the world*.

Psalm 3 (and probably 4 + 5) David knows he has brought this on himself.

Completely gone is any protestation of his innocence. His deliverance now is entirely God's free gift.

Psalm 139 Again, not specifically anchored in an event, but here is the fully mature David. He knows that God knows him better than he knows himself. He has “perfect hatred” toward those who hate God. He asks God to search him and reveal any wickedness in him, and lead him in the way everlasting.