

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Bible Study Notes Book of Psalms

1-25-12

Psalm 135

The Story Behind the Psalm: These form a new group of Psalms called the "Hallelujah Psalms." Hallelujah means "Praise ye Jah," or "Praise ye Jehovah." An interesting thing about the word "hallelujah" is that it is the same in every language. It is the one word in all languages that becomes the common denominator. We cannot all speak the same language about most subjects, but when it comes to praising the Lord, we all speak the same language.

These Psalms are divided into three groups—group one ends with hallelujah. In this group are Psalms 104 and 105. Group two begins with hallelujah. This includes Psalms 111 and 112. Group three both begins and ends with hallelujah. Included are Psalms 106, 113, 135, and 146 through 150.

It is interesting that with the passing of the years David's praise becomes greater. The term, "Praise ye the Lord," is included more and more in the Psalms written near the end of David's life. He once said, "I will praise Him more and more," and so he did. As these Psalms are read, the reader should picture an aged David lifting his hands and voice Heavenward thanking God for His grace, for His mercy, for His lovingkindness and for His faithfulness.

The Way They Were Used by God's People: The Jews would use these as doxology Psalms when they wanted to praise the Lord. They were used at any time. They were much like our songs, "Praise Him, Praise Him, Jesus Our Blessed Redeemer," "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name," etc. In other words, they were general songs of praise used at any occasion the heart leaped with joy.

Theme: A hymn of praise. This psalm contrasts the greatness of God with the powerlessness of idols. Pagans worship idols while God's people worship the living God.

Author: Anonymous

PSALM 135:4

That the descendants of Jacob (Israel) were a chosen people reflects God's commission to the nation in Deuteronomy 7:6-8 and in Peter's sermon to the church in 1 Peter 2:9. God treasures us. He gives love and mercy to all those who believe in him.

PSALM 135:15-18

Those who worshiped idols were as blind and insensitive as the idols themselves. They couldn't see or hear what God had to say. In subtle, imperceptible ways we become like the idols we worship. If the true God is your God, you will become more like him as you worship him. What are your goals? What takes priority in your life? Choose carefully because you will take on the characteristics of whatever you worship.

PSALM 136

The Story Behind the Psalm

Perhaps this Psalm was used at the returning of the ark to Jerusalem. David perhaps wrote it at the time when he danced around the ark for joy and when he was so severely criticized by his wife, Michal. This was a happy time for David. Picture him going to his room, penning this beautiful Psalm upon realizing that the ark had returned to its home. This was the ark of the covenant; that little piece of furniture that rested in the holy of holies over which God's presence dwelt with His people. It was a sacred piece of furniture. It always preceded the Israelites into battle. As they marched from Egypt to the promised land, it preceded them on their journeys. Read I Chronicles 16:41.

Twenty-six times do we find the statement, "His mercy endureth forever." The word "mercy" is worth note. It means "pity in action." The word "endureth" means "abideth as Heaven." In other words, God's pity in action abideth as long as Heaven abideth and is as beautiful to the believer as are the golden streets of the holy city.

This Psalm was used when the ark was brought into the temple in II Chronicles 5:13. It was used when the foundations were laid in the new temple in Ezra 3:11. In Jeremiah 33:11, Jeremiah used it while he was in prison and saw the kingdom age.

The Way It Was Used by God's People

Psalm 136 was a chant. It was also sung responsively. The priests and the choir would join in responsive singing; or the choir and the people would do so, or the choir and another choir would sing it. It was sung at any and many joyous occasions.

Theme: The never-ending story of God's love. God deserves our praise because his endless love never fails.

Author: Anonymous

PSALM 136:1

Repeated throughout this psalm is the phrase "His faithful love endures forever." This psalm may have been a responsive reading, with the congregation saying these words in unison after each sentence. The repetition made this important lesson sink in. God's love includes aspects of love, kindness, mercy, and faithfulness. We never have to worry that God will run out of love because it flows from a well that will never run dry.

PSALM 137

The Story Behind the Psalm: God's people were a singing people. They had become famous throughout the world for their singing. The Babylonian people, no doubt, looked forward with delight to hearing the Jews sing. When the Jews arrived as captives in Babylon, they were requested to sing. However, they refused, as is shown in this Psalm. They complained, "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" So they placed their harps on the willow trees and did not sing. This is sad, for if ever there is a time when God's people should sing it is when we are in the presence of unsaved people. The people of Babylon need to hear the song of God. It is one thing to sing in the promised land when only God's people can hear; it is another thing to sing in Babylon where those who are not God's people need to hear.

The Way It Was Used by God's People: This Psalm was used when in the presence of strangers. Devout Jews would use it as a reminder that they should sing so that those who are not God's people may hear.

Theme: A person in exile weeps over the bitterness of captivity. Our sorrow can make it difficult to imagine singing joyful songs again.

Author: Anonymous

PSALM 137:7

The Edomites were related to the Israelites, both nations having descended from Isaac and his father, Abraham. Although Israel shared its southern border with Edom, there was bitter hatred between the two nations. The Edomites did not come to help when the city of Jerusalem was besieged by the Babylonian army. In fact, they rejoiced when the city was destroyed (Jeremiah 49:7-22; Joel 3:19; Obadiah 1:1-21).

PSALM 137:8, 9

God destroyed Babylon and its offspring for their proud assault against God and his Kingdom. The Medes and Persians destroyed Babylon in 539 B.C. Many of those who were oppressed lived to see the victory. The phrase about the infants is harsh because the psalmist is crying out for judgment: "Treat the Babylonians the way they treated us."

PSALM 138

The Story Behind the Psalm

Psalms 138 through 145 form a cluster of Psalms, all written by David. They follow after the fifteen ascension Psalms, and the devout Israelite used them as a manual of private prayer and praise. These eight Psalms were composed in the first person and this particular Psalm, as well as one or more of the others, has to do with the promise made to David in II Samuel 7 which should be read along with this Psalm. Picture David meditating on the great Messianic promise in II Samuel 7 as he pens this Psalm as a pattern for the private prayer life of God's people.

The Way It Was Used by God's People

Some of the Psalms were used for public praise. Some were used for congregational singing. Some were used for choir singing. Some were used for special numbers in the worship of Jehovah. This particular Psalm was used during an Israelite's private prayer time or during what we would commonly call private devotions.

Theme: Thanksgiving for answered prayer. God works out his plans for our lives and will bring us through the difficulties we face.

Author: David

PSALM 138:1

“Before the gods” may mean in the presence of subordinate heavenly beings (angels), or, more likely, it may be a statement ridiculing the kings or gods of the pagan nations. God is supreme in the whole earth.

PSALM 138:1-3

Thanksgiving should be an integral part of our praise to God. This theme is woven throughout the Psalms. As we praise and thank God for material and spiritual blessings, we should also thank him for answered prayer. Remember when you asked God for protection, strength, comfort, patience, love, or other special needs, and he supplied them. Beware of taking God’s provision and answered prayer for granted.

PSALM 138:8

Every person dreams and makes plans for the future. Then they work hard to see those dreams and plans come true. But to make the most of life, we must include God’s plan in our plans. He alone knows what is best for us; he alone can fulfill his purpose for us. As you make plans and dream dreams, talk with God about them.

PSALM 139

The Story Behind the Psalm

The Psalm title is, "To the chief musician." The last time we found these words used as a title of a Psalm was in the 119th Psalm, which means that this Psalm was worthy to be used by the best of singers. It was dedicated to the leader of the temple choir to be set to music, and it was sung in the worship of Jehovah. Aben Ezra says that this is the most glorious and excellent Psalm of them all. It is divided into four stanzas of six verses each. Verses 1-6 deal with the omniscience of God; verses 7-12 speak of His omnipresence; verses 13-18 deal with His omnipotence, and then verses 19-24 deal with the prayer of David.

Many scholars such as Rogers and others believe that David composed this Psalm when a shepherd boy. It is not difficult to envision David watching over his flock in the wilderness thinking of God’s omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence and penning these beautiful words.

The Way It Was Used by God’s People

It was used primarily in private devotions and was repeated every morning and evening by the devout Israelite. It was also used for public worship as aforementioned.

Theme: God is all-seeing, all-knowing, all-powerful, and everywhere present. God knows us, God is with us, and his greatest gift is to allow us to know him.

Author: David

PSALM 139:1-5

Sometimes we don't let people get to know us completely because we are afraid they will discover something about us that they won't like. But God already knows everything about us, even to the number of hairs on our heads (Matthew 10:30), and still he accepts and loves us. God is with us through every situation, in every trial—protecting, loving, guiding. He knows and loves us completely.

PSALM 139:7

God is omnipresent—he is present everywhere. Because this is so, you can never escape from his Spirit. This is good news to those who know and love God, because no matter what we do or where we go, we can never be far from God's comforting presence (see Romans 8:35-39).

PSALM 139:13-15

God's character goes into the creation of every person. When you feel worthless or even begin to hate yourself, remember that God's Spirit is ready and willing to work within you. We should have as much respect for ourselves as our Maker has for us.

PSALM 139:21-24

David's hatred for his enemies came from his zeal for God. David regarded his enemies as God's enemies, so his hatred was a desire for God's righteous justice and not for personal vengeance. Is it all right to be angry at people who hate God? Yes, but we must remember that it is God who will deal with them, not us. If we truly love God, then we will be deeply hurt if someone hates him. David asked God to search his heart and mind and point out any wrong motives that may have been behind his strong words. But while we seek justice against evil, we must also pray that God's enemies will turn to him before he judges them (see Matthew 5:44).

PSALM 139:23, 24

David asked God to search for sin and point it out, even to the level of testing his thoughts. This is exploratory surgery for sin. How are we to recognize sin unless God points it out? Then, when God shows us, we can repent and be forgiven. Make this verse your prayer. If you ask the Lord to search your heart and your thoughts and to reveal your sin, you will be continuing on "the path of everlasting life."

PSALM 140

The Story Behind the Psalm

David was being hunted like a deer on the mountains. He seldom rested. Here we have a appeal asking for God's protection and God's destruction of his foes.

Notice this Psalm is also "To the chief musician," which means the writer wished that this Psalm be under the care of one of the great masters of song that it might be sung properly. Perhaps David's life was endangered when he came in contact with Saul and Doeg. At any rate, he was running on the mountains and wrote this, one of the more beautiful of the Psalms. Notice in verses 1-5 he is threatened by bitter enemies. In verses 1, 4 and 6 he asks God for help and yet all at the same time he praises God for his protection in the past.

The Way It Was Used by God's People

Notice the word "selah" is used, which means it is a Psalm to be sung quietly, slowly and restfully. Someone has said that the word "selah" bids us pause over the dark colors of a Psalm. Hence, God's people used this Psalm in times of melancholy and loneliness.

Theme: Prayer for protection against those who slander or threaten you. Deliverance begins with concentrating on our future life with God.

Author: David

PSALM 140:12

To whom can the poor turn when they are persecuted? They lack the money to get professional help and so are usually unable to defend themselves. But there is always someone on their side—the Lord will stand by them and ultimately bring about justice. This should be a comfort for us all. No matter what our situation may be, the Lord is with us. But this truth should also call us to live responsibly with others. As God’s people, we are required to defend the rights of the powerless.

PSALM 141

The Story Behind the Psalm

This is what some call a memorial Psalm. It was written perhaps years after the particular event in memory of that event.

The event that David was calling to mind here was perhaps the one recorded in I Samuel 24 which should be read as Psalm 141 is read. David had Opportunity to put Saul to death at the cave of Engedi, yet he spared the life of his bitter enemy, only cutting off his skirt and not allowing his friends to touch Saul.

The Way It Was Used by God's People

It was used by the Israelites as they were remembering a great deliverance from their God, especially deliverance in battle.

Theme: A prayer for help when facing temptation. David asks God to protect him and to give him wisdom in accepting criticism. Be open to honest criticism—God may be speaking to you through others.

Author: David

PSALM 141:3

James wrote that “the tongue is a small thing, but what enormous damage it can do” (James 3:5). On the average, a person opens his or her mouth approximately 700 times a day to speak. David wisely asked God to keep him from speaking evil—even as he underwent persecution. Jesus himself was silent before his accusers (Matthew 26:63). Knowing the power of the tongue, we would do well to ask God to guard what we say so that our words will bring honor to his name.

PSALM 141:4

Evil acts begin with evil desires. It isn't enough to ask God to keep you away from temptation, make you stronger, or change your circumstances. You must ask him to change you on the inside—at the level of your desires.

PSALM 141:5

David says that being rebuked by a godly person is a kindness. Nobody really likes criticism, but everybody can benefit from it when it is given wisely and taken humbly. David suggested how to accept criticism: (1) Don't refuse it, (2) consider it a kindness, and (3) keep quiet (don't fight back). Putting these suggestions into practice will help you control how you react to criticism, making it productive rather than destructive, no matter how it was originally intended.

PSALM 142

The Story Behind the Psalm

Notice the title, "Maschil of David." This means it was a Psalm written for instruction. The instruction he is giving us here is concerning how to word our prayer in times of dire distress. David was in the cave, either the cave of En-gedi, Adullam, or some other lonely cavern where he could hide from Saul and Saul's bloodhounds. Probably David was in the cave of Adullam. I Samuel 22:1, 2 should be read in connection with this Psalm.

The interesting and important thing is that David was in a cave. Someone has said that caves make good prayer closets, and if David had prayed as much in the palace as he did in the cave, he might have turned out better. Picture David in a cave hiding from Saul as he pens this one of the most famous of the Psalms.

The Way It Was Used by God's People

This Psalm was very popular for the prayer closet. It was used by God's people during private devotional time.

Theme: A prayer when overwhelmed and desperate. When we feel cornered by our enemies, only God can keep us safe.

Author: David

PSALM 142:6

Have you ever felt that no one cared what happened to you? David had good reason to feel that way, and he wrote, "Hear my cry, for I am very low." Through prayer we can pull out of our tailspin and be reminded that God cares for us deeply.

PSALM 142:7 This psalm was written when David was hiding from Saul in caves like the ones at Adullam (1 Samuel 22) or En-gedi (1 Samuel 24). These may have seemed like prisons to him because of the confinement.