

The Arrangement of the Psalms: Part 2

Last week we looked briefly at the influence the psalms have on New Testament theology. We also looked at some of the evidence that there is an intentional arrangement to the Book of Psalms as a whole. Today we will continue to explore that arrangement and why it might be significant.

Introduction & Conclusion

Last week we observed that Psalm 1 and Psalm 2 appear to function together as an introduction to the entire Psalter. Let's look a bit closer at these two. First, there are several interesting connections that bind these two psalms together.

Connection	Psalm 1	Psalm 2
Both use the Hebrew word הגה hgh which means to meditate in psalm 1 and to plot in psalm 2	2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.	1 Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?
Psalm 1 begins with "blessed" and Psalm 2 closes with the word "blessed" forming an inclusio.	1 Blessed is the man...	12 Blessed are all who take refuge in him.
Both end with the perishing of the wicked.	6 for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.	12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled...
Psalm 1 deals with the individual life, Psalm 2 deals with the public domain. Individual worship/corporate worship.	1. The man... 2. ...his delight... 3. He is like a tree...	1 ... nations ... people 2 ...take counsel together... 3 Let us... 9. You shall break them 12. Blessed are all...
Psalm 1 contrasts the wicked and righteous, Psalm 2 show the strife between the wicked and righteous. ¹	4 The wicked are not so...	3 Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.

Because of these connections and their content, the pairing of these two psalms introduce the major themes and ideas that will be developed throughout the rest of the Psalter. Nearly everything that follows flows from the foundational concepts introduced here. Psalm 1 establishes the power and goodness of the Word of God and the two responses to it. Psalm 2 introduces the Son who is the anointed King that God has established and who will expand the messianic kingdom throughout the entire world. Both Torah and Messiah are introduced along with the judgment and grace (law and gospel) that relates to each. The bringing together of the Torah and Messiah in relation to both God's people of God and the nations of the world connects with the promises and covenants in the Law and prophets and forms a messianic emphasis that anticipates the salvation of Israel and the world in Jesus Christ.

¹ The beginning of book 1 picks up in Psalm 3 with a prayer in a time of distress, building upon the introduced theme.

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Similar to how Psalm 1 and 2 introduce all the major themes that will be developed throughout the book, Psalm 150 is a response to the answers to all the petitions and a distillation of the all the calls to praise. It is also a fitting chorus for those who have become partakers in the promises through Christ.

150 Praise the LORD!

- Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty heavens!
- ² Praise him for his mighty deeds;
praise him according to his excellent greatness!
- ³ Praise him with trumpet sound;
praise him with lute and harp!
- ⁴ Praise him with tambourine and dance;
praise him with strings and pipe!
- ⁵ Praise him with sounding cymbals;
praise him with loud clashing cymbals!
- ⁶ Let everything that has breath praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD!

The Flow of the Book of Psalms

Now that we have a sense of the key themes presented in the introduction of the book and an idea of how it all comes together in praise, let's look at how it flows from start to finish. As I mentioned last week, there are a lot of unanswered questions, so we need to be careful but there does appear to be a progression from start to finish. We also do not have time to work through these topics in detail so if you are interested in learning more let me know and I can try to steer you toward resources that may be helpful for you.

As we already mentioned, several general observations can be made regarding how the material changes as we move through the Book of Psalms. This doesn't mean that every individual psalm will fit the pattern but that the overall tone and feel of the book shifts. We can pick up on several clues that point to movement within the book.

1. The change in the words used for God. In Book 1 the personal name Yahweh predominates but when we shift to Book 2 it shifts to Elohim.
2. The descriptions of the Law in the Torah psalms shift and expand as we progress through the books.
3. The various "sets" of psalms often appear to have progressions within them that connect to the broader flow of the Books. It is probably easier to provide examples here than to describe it.
 - a. We already saw that Psalm 1 & 2 introduce us to God's word and the Messiah King. When we get to Psalm 18 and 19 we have another coupling of Torah and Messiah, with 18 being a Royal psalm and 19 being a Torah psalm. That is followed by a set of Royal

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psalms that have an interesting pattern that begins to bring the messianic and divine kingship references together.

- i. Psalm 20-21 are royal psalms focused on the Anointed King.
- ii. Psalm 22 is a messianic royal psalm that blends an emphasis on the Anointed Messiah King and Yahweh Himself as king (3, 8, etc.)
- iii. Psalm 23-24 focus on Yahweh as King. The shepherd imagery in 23 is likely connected to kingship in the life of David and in the prophets (Ez. 37:24) and His rule in 24 is clear.

b. This pattern of blending the concepts of Yahweh as King with the Anointed human King is found in other sets of psalms as well. Psalm 96, 105, and 106 all parallel portions of King David's Psalm of thanks in 1 Chronicles 16:8-36. That is significant because David sings this song after the Ark is brought up to Jerusalem. Think about what is happening at this event. David is moving God's symbolic throne to the place where David's own throne is. The rule of God and the rule of His anointed King are brought together.

c. Another example is in the cluster of Psalms from 120 to 134 known as Psalms of Ascents. These are praise and thanksgiving psalms sung as people went up to the Temple.

- i. There is a symmetry to these. There are 7 psalms, 2 by David and 5 unnamed leading up to Psalm 127, which is by Solomon, then another 7 with 2 by David and 5 unnamed. The name Yahweh is mentioned 24 times in each of the sets of 7.
- ii. Another interesting thing about these is 12 of these 15 psalms contain at least one part of the famous priestly blessing from Numbers 6:22-27.
 1. Not only are the divine and human thrones brought together in the Psalter, but the anointed king and the priesthood are as well!

4. Movement and messianic influence can also be seen in the way sets connect within each of the books. Let's look, for example at the progression in Book 4.

Psalms	Description
89 (Book 3)	Destruction and ruin
90-91	After the devastation of Ps. 89 and the exile that it brings, we return to the fundamentals with a psalm by Moses. God is to be their dwelling place.
92-100	Yahweh reigns over His people and provides for them
101-103	Bracketed psalms of David. Desire for God / connection to the Anointed King
104-106	Praise to the Lord (hallelujah)
107 (Book 5)	Psalm 107 begins with the gathering people from the lands (3)

5. Although it is a little bit harder to see, there also seems to be movement throughout the entire Psalter with each book emphasizing or being characterized by a different set of themes. These themes appear to trace the experience of Israel as God's chosen people and their Anointed King through redemptive history. These shifts are captured within the Psalms at the transition points between the books.

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Book	Movement of the Book	How it Ends/Transitions	General Character
Book 1	Opposition	Ps. 41 Betrayal & Hope	God establishes His King but there is opposition. God promises victory.
Book 2	Proclamation	Ps. 72 Prayer for the King	The Kingdom is proclaimed to the nations.
Book 3	Calamity	Ps. 89 The King & Holy City are ruined but the Covenant is reaffirmed	Exile: God's people fail to trust Him. The nations overcome the earthly King.
Book 4	Maturity	Ps. 106 Contrition and a plea for restoration	The Promise stands, the people must find deliverance in the rule of Yahweh.
Book 5	Realization	Ps. 150 All praise and Glory to God	The people are gathered, the Kingdom is established. The rule of Messiah and Yahweh are united. Torah and the King are in perfect unity.

So what? How does all this help us to better understand or apply the Psalms?

We are going to spend the entire next class talking about the Psalms as a whole and their connection to Jesus. By recognizing a messianic emphasis in the arrangement of the whole, the various prophetic elements contained in the individual psalms that point to Christ are highlighted. The way the psalms organize the material from the Law and prophets is like a lens that shapes and focuses all the various prophecies into their fulfillment in the Messiah.

This provides us with a deeper understanding of the way in which the Psalms are prophetic and connect to Jesus. It also has practical benefits to our use of the Psalms as prayers which will be the main thing we cover in the next lesson.

Homework

1. Read through the final Psalm in each book (41, 72, 89, 106, 150) along with the chart above and see if you agree with the transitions and general character for each that I have in the chart.
2. As you read through these during the week, allow a promise or a praise in each to guide your prayers thinking about how they connect to you.