

THE BOOK OF PSALMS

This is a hymn book or prayer book of the Bible. These hymns were composed by different authors over a long period and were used by the Israelites their worship and eventually they were included in the Holy Scripture.

The Psalms are of many kinds thus, hymns of praise and worship, prayer for help, protection, salvation, prayer for forgiveness, thanksgiving and petitions for the punishment of enemies. These prayers were both personal and National.

NB: The word Psalms is derived from a Greek word Psalmoi, referring to songs of praise, usually accompanied with stringed instruments. Today, the word is used to refer to a sacred song or hymn used in praising or worshipping God.

According to the German scholar, Gunkel came up with a modern study of Psalms and identified six categories of Psalms thus, Hymn of praise, National laments, Royal/Messianic Psalms, Individual laments and Individual thanks giving.

Important Themes Reflected In The Psalms

- ❖ The Psalms have the following important themes :
- ❖ Deliverance from enemies
- ❖ Realisation of God's presence
- ❖ Thanks giving
- ❖ The Exodus theme
- ❖ Repentance
- ❖ Nature of God
- ❖ God's revelation of himself to his people and the Nations
- ❖ The place of God
- ❖ Revenge against Israel's enemies
- ❖ God's activities i.e. creator, judge, etc.
- ❖ Personal fellowship/communion with God

Importance of psalms to the Jews

- Psalms were used for purposes of worship among the Jews
- They were used for liturgical reasons i.e. Procedure of worship
- They could be used to give praises to God
- They were used to invoke Yahweh in the case of very hard circumstances
- They were for revealing Yahweh's historical role in the life Israel
- They were used to reveal the Nation's theocratic nature
- They were for showing the nature of God
- They were used to show the Might of God in the face of their enemies.
- They were used to express God's works.
- They were for the purpose of developing the people's relationship with God
- They were used for celebrating important festivals
- They were used for giving honor and respect to God.
- They were used during the coronation of Kings.
- They were used to express Israel's National pride
- They were used to express the Messianic future of Israel.
- They were helpful during times of distress and trouble.
- They were used during times of repentance.

PSALMS 2, GOD'S CHOSEN KING

This Psalms originated from the pre-exilic period. The situation that gave birth to this Psalm was the enthronement of the King from the line of David. It has the following ideas

- The King is appointed on God's behalf, to bring God's promised blessings to the people.
- It reveals the rebellion of other rulers against the people and the anointed King of Judah.
- To the Psalter, this is a stupid act because it is as good as an attack against God, the appointing authority.
- God rebuked the rebels and assured them that their plans would surely fail.

- He had installed the King of Judah by his power and therefore no human plans could afford to overthrow him.
- God considers such rebellious Nations as stupid for failing to know that he alone controls the destiny of the King and his people.
- The King announces that had promised to be his father and him his son.
- Therefore if he remained obedient to God, he would be empowered.
- God warns the rebellious rulers to submit to the King of Judah or else they would face God's anger and thus die.
- The rulers of the world are called upon not to forget that God is the King of all Kings.
- It ends with a blessing to all those who acknowledge the rule and protection of God.

Lessons for Christians

- Christians should respect leaders since all leaders on earth represent God.
- They should depend on God alone under all circumstances other than trusting human leaders.
- They should ask for forgiveness in case of any mistake.
- They should take God's words serious thus if He says yes, who can say no.
- Leaders should have total trust in God and take prayer as a serious weapon.
- Leaders should have the responsibility of serving God first then other people willingly and justly.
- All leadership comes from God so all Christians should respect their leaders and take their advice.
- All earthly leaders should accept to be controlled by God.
- Christians should take God as so powerful and this gives chance to people to change and come back to Him.
- They should be careful so as to escape God's anger.
- They should take God as the overall ruler of this universe and knows people's destiny.

PSALMS 20, A PRAYER ASKING FOR VICTORY IN WAR.

This was a prayer to God on behalf of the King of Judah asking for victory as he prepared to go to a battle field.

- The Psalmists pleaded with the Lord to answer his anointed King when in trouble and to offer protection when needed.
- The Psalmists prayed to God to send help from his sanctuary and grant support from his King of Zion
- The Psalmists prayed to God to accept the King's offerings and be pleased with all his sacrifices before being confronted by his enemies.
- The Psalmists longed to shout for joy upon victory being granted i.e they would celebrate his victory and praise God as well.
- The Psalmists asked God to give their King what he had desired and make all his plans successful.
- The Psalmists proclaimed that the Lord would answer his King and give them great victories by his power .
- The Psalmists mocked those who trusted in their war chariots and horses thus such people would stumble and fall.
- To the Psalmists, their victory would come by trusting in the power of God their Lord rather than trusting in large and huge armies.
- The Psalmists acknowledged God's help for Israel without which she would be too weak to face his enemies.
- The Psalmists fore saw victory coming their way thus their enemies would fall as they would stand raise and stand firm.
- The Psalmists wanted the Lord to give victory to the King and answer them called upon for the Lord was their only victory.
- The Psalmists encouraged all the people to be obedient only to the King whom the Lord had anointed.

Questions

- a) *Discuss the message behind Psalms 20.*
- b) *Comment on the view that Psalms 20 is sometimes called a prayer for victory.*

Lessons that Christians draw from psalms 20.

- Christians should pray to God when in trouble.
- They should ask protection from God.
- Christians should thank God for whatever life achievements.
- They should plead on behalf of others.
- They should be united so as to get victory.
- They should help those in need.
- They should give material support to the church.
- They should seek blessings from God through prayer. They should be joyful and praise God's name.
- They should remain hopeful in times of difficulties.
- They should trust God during their difficult moments.
- They should rely on God for whatever they need in their lives.
- They should serve God faithfully.
- They should be obedient to God's appointed leaders.
- They should shout with joy when they are victorious.
- They should pray to God before undertaking any venture.
- They should give thanks to God always.
- They should be confident when dealing with God.

PSALMS 22, A PERSONAL LAMENT FOR SUFFERING, ANGUISH AND PRAISE.

This Psalm is a personal lament for suffering, a cry for anguish and praise to the Lord after the life of suffering.

- The Psalmist experienced terrible suffering and someone over whelmed by his or her grip.
- Besides, it pictured a desperate need for God’s help as the sufferer was in a dilemma.
- The Psalmist cried desperately for help but could not see anything coming his way.
- However much he called onto God, he could not answer him. Both day and night he could get no rest.
- Despite his misery, the Psalmist acknowledged God being enthroned as the only one whom the people of Israel cried to.
- The Psalmist painfully recalled how their ancestors trusted in God and he saved them.
- The Psalmist lost his sense of humanity thus he was no longer a human being but rather a worm despised by everyone.
- The Psalmist felt mocked for having trusted in the Lord who could not save him from his situation.
- The Psalmist prayed to God to be near him.
- To the Psalmist, he had always relied on God ever since he was born but God was not helping him.
- His enemies surrounded him in his helpless place i.e. they were fierce bulls that they opened their mouths like lions
- The Psalmist expresses his readiness to testify to others the power of God’s deliverance from the torture of these evil men.
- The un answered question in the sufferer’s mind is “why does God let me suffer like this if I have trusted in him?”
- In the last section, the sufferer changes his mood and praises God. He portrays God as the King of the world.
- It is this great God that the sufferer continued to trust even in the depth of his agony and his trust was proved right.

- The Psalm does not indicate how God rescued the sufferer but he praises God in front of the assembly of people after deliverance.
- He says that God will have to be worshipped by all nations since he is such a great deliverer.
- He points to the coming of the Kingdom of God, where his deliverance will have to be remembered by everyone.

QN. To what extent is Psalms 22 a reflection of suffering. (to a large extent)

THE PASSION OF JESUS IN RELATION TO PSALMS 22.

- While on the cross, Jesus quoted the opening words of Psalms 22.
- The sufferer is despised the same way Jesus was despised.
- Despite the agony, the sufferer just like Jesus remained firm.
- Evil men surrounded the sufferer just as Jesus was crucified in the company of evil men.
- Just as Jesus, the sufferer says that the nails tore his feet and hands.
- Being surrounded by beasts shows how strong Roman soldiers surrounded Jesus.
- Jesus was condemned to death justifying the statement that they tear their prey open.
- The sufferer's strength is dried up just as Jesus was helped by Simon to carry the cross.
- Jesus himself confirms the point of God's power over death.
- That everyone would remember God's deliverance was confirmed in Christ's character.
- The enemies shared his garments like those of Christ.

QN. Psalms 22 is sometimes referred to as the person Psalm. Comment on this statement giving reference to Jesus' personal experience.

Lessons for Christians from psalms 22.

- They should tolerate their suffering.

- They should remain hopeful in times of difficult moments
- They should pray to God when they are suffering.
- They should be holy.
- They should trust in God especially when they are suffering.
- They should fulfill their promises.
- They seek protection from God.
- They should help those in pain.
- They should appreciate God for his wonders.
- They should console those in misery.
- They should assist the poor and widows.

PSALMS 47, THE SUPREME RULER.

This Psalm was sung on the Jewish new year's day. It is at times called the enthronement Psalm because it portrays God as King.

- He calls upon people to clap their hands with joy and praise to God through singing loud song
- God is the most high and he is to be feared by all peoples of the world.
- He is a great King over the world and he actually rules over the whole of it.
- He made the people register victory over the Nations as well as to rule over such Nations.
- He chose for them the land where they lived and it became a proud possession of theirs just because he loves them.
- There are shouts of joy and loud blasts of trumpets just as the Lord goes up to his throne.
- God sits on his sacred throne and holds all shields of office, it is he who gives power to the Kings of the world. Therefore they all exalt him.
- The rulers of the Nations assembly with the people to worship the God of Abraham.
- The writers points to the promises of the Abrahamic covenant..

- That God's rule is supreme and is more powerful than all national armies throughout the World.
- The universal nature of God is emphasised in the claim that "All nations will come to appreciate the God of Abraham and Israel as their God too".

Qn. Analyse the themes in Psalms 47.

- The universality of God.
- The fear of God.
- God, the source of victory.
- God's love.
- The providence of God.
- The omnipotence of God.
- The greatness of God.
- The faithfulness of God.
- Thanksgiving.
- God's rule.
- The monotheism of God.
- The holiness of God.

RELEVANCE OF PSALMS 47 TO CHRISTIANS IN UGANDA TODAY

- They should believe in God's promises because he is faithful.
- They should sing praises to God.
- They should always be joyful in God's sight.
- They should worship God alone since he is the supreme ruler.
- They should be united since God is universal.
- They should seek God's protection since he is majestic.
- They should uphold the supremacy of God.
- They should fear God, the most high.
- They should respect all authority because it is God given.
- They should trust in God because he gives victory.

PSALMS 137, A NATIONAL LAMENT BY ISRAELITES IN EXILE.

This Psalm is related to the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. It is therefore possible that it was written soon after this year and the writer seems to have been one of the exiles that lived in a Jewish community full of slave workers.

The Israelites remembered their fate in Babylon and demanded for revenge upon their captors.

Summary of the message in Psalms 137.

- While in exile, their captors would force them to sing God's songs merely for entertainment's sake.
- They wondered how they could worship Yahweh in the foreign land where other gods were in control.
- They were in agony due to the heavy work they were subjected to as slaves.
- They came to a moment of shading tears whenever they remembered Zion and the good homes they had left there.
- They hang up their music instruments because they could no longer afford to make fun of god's music in front of their captors.
- They cried to God to revenge against their enemies, the Babylonians for having devastated Jerusalem.
- They all requested God to destroy the Edomites because they had in the fall of Jerusalem and at the same time raided Judah's territory at the hour of fall.
- They called upon God to destroy the Babylonians and their babies so that the race does not continue.
- The captors carried out cruel slaughter of their children during war and this led to anger among the exiled Jews.
- They continued to place their hope in God, sure that one day he would revenge against the Babylonians.
- After the exile, they continued to recite this Psalm in the rebuilt temple, especially on the day of mourning.

Relevance of psalms 137 to Christians.

- Christians should pray to God even when in suffering.
- They should remain hopeful in times of difficulties.
- They seek protection from God.
- They should trust in God for their redemption.
- They should endure and tolerate their suffering.
- They should praise and worship God from every where.
- They should forgive and reconcile with their enemies.
- They should remain committed to God at all times.
- They should live the work of judgment to God alone.
- They should give assistance to those in need.
- They should give comfort to those in pain.
- They should preach the good news of salvation anywhere.
- They should repent off their sins.
- They should be ready to receive God anywhere.
- they should follow God's commands so that he can defend them.

Jesus' teaching about enemies.

- Love them
- Forgive them
- Pray for them
- Reconcile with them
- Help them understand the good news of salvation
- Settle the disputes with them
- Leave the work of judgment to God
- Be on the alert and watch over their actions
- Speak to them freely.

QN. Account for the bitterness and hatred expressed in Psalms 137?

Justify the bitterness and hatred expressed in Psalms 137?

- The exiles were being tormented by their captors.
- The exiles were being mocked by their captors to sing for them.
- The exiles were mourning for the loss of their homes, families, city and temple.
- The exiles were being oppressed by their captors.
- The exiles were in the state of hopelessness.
- The Babylonians had looted everything.
- The exiles had been taken to a foreign land.
- They were living in a land that was un-Godly.
- The Lord had abandoned them.
- The exiles were home sick.
- The Edomites were rejoicing over their suffering.
- The exiles were seeking revenge upon the Edomites.
- Their way of worship had been interrupted.
- The Babylonians were too rude to them.

Importance / role of Psalms in the history of Israel.

- The Israelites used Psalms to appreciate God for his provisions.
- They used them as a form of prayer.
- They used them to identify themselves as the chosen and special people who belonged to God.
- They were used for personal and National repentance.
- They used them to express their sorrow and distress.
- They used them to ask God to punish their enemies.
- Some of them helped to seek for protection from God against their enemies.
- Some of them helped to show their history and heritage to the new generation.
- They used them to show God's character and nature including his holiness.,
- They used them to show their love to God.
- They were used to show gratitude to God particularly for the good things and blessings.
- The people fellowshiped with God through Psalms.

- They used them to predict the future.
- They used them to express their faith and confirm their commitment to their God.
- They used them as their National Anthem.
- They used them to seek for blessings from God in form of good harvest and victory in wars.

Relevance of psalms to Christians.

- They should praise God for his goodness.
- They should appreciate God for his goodness.
- They should always pray to God.
- They should repent off their sins.
- They should serve God faithfully.
- They should approach God with holiness.
- They should seek protection from God.
- They should remain hopeful in difficult moments.
- They should give comfort and console one another.
- They should express their love to God.
- They should celebrate important religious days.
- They should observe and maintain monotheism.
- They should approach God through prayer.