

Mythbusting the Psalms

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from 2016 Florida College Lectures)

Introduction:

- A. What you thought you knew about the Book of Psalm; developed from 2016 Florida College lectures by Tom Hamilton “Five Well-Known (But False) Facts About the Psalms” and David McClister “Literary Structures in the Psalms”
1. One Psalm called a Psalm, not Psalms, just as a single song is called a song and not songs.
 2. It is important to sound like you know what you are talking about. Irregardless, veHEMent, and lengthly are not words; Jesus never said “blessed are those look down on education.” He said, “Blessed are the meek.” Peter never included incoherence in his list of Christian virtues.

I. DO YOU REALLY KNOW THE PSALMS AS WELL AS YOU THINK YOU DO?

- A. “Psalms has the longest chapter in the Bible; it has 176 verses.”
1. Psalm 119 is not the longest chapter in the Bible if you count words and not verses.
 - a. Stephen Langton divided the Bible into chapters in the year A.D. 1227. Langton was a professor at the University of Paris and later he became the Archbishop of Canterbury.
 - b. Robert Stephanus, a French printer, divided the verses for his Greek New Testament. It was published in 1551.
 - c. The first entire Bible in which these chapter and verse divisions were used was Stephanus’ edition of the Latin Vulgate (1555).
 - d. The first English New Testament to have both chapter and verse divisions was the Geneva Bible (1560).
 2. So by word count, what is the longest chapter in the Bible?
 1. Deuteronomy 28 - 1409 words
 2. Numbers 7 - 1373 words
 3. Leviticus 13 - 1347 words
 4. Psalm 119 - 1340 words
 5. Luke 1 - 1186 words
 6. Jeremiah 51 - 1185 words
- B. “Psalms is the longest book in the Bible; it has 150 chapters.”
1. The Book of Psalm is not the longest book of the Bible if you count words and not chapters
 1. Jeremiah - 30,264 words
 2. Genesis - 28,865 words
 3. Ezekiel - 26,621 words
 4. Exodus - 23,937 words
 5. Numbers - 23,374 words
 6. Psalms - 25,476 words
 6. Isaiah - 23,247 words
- C. “The Psalms were written for reading.”
1. Psalms written for hearers, not readers, to be heard more than read

- a. Very few people in Bible times could read
- b. Very few copies of the written scriptures were made
- 2. Rev. 1:3 - "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it"
 - a. Most people could not read!
 - b. Soferim 11:2 (Talmud, p. 218): "A town in which there is only one who reads; he stands up, reads (the Torah), and sits down, he stands up, reads and sits down, even seven times."
 - c. "In rural farmlands, 1% could read; in towns, 5%; and in cities, 15%." ("Illiteracy in the Land of Israel in the First Centuries AD" by Meir Barilan)
- 3. The Psalms were written in such a way as to be heard and memorized, just as a poem or a song facilitates memory, recall, and recitation
 - a. The Psalms are highly figurative utilizing vivid images, because we learn best by association
 - b. Douglas Hofstadter - "All learning is done by analogy."

II. THE PSALMS WERE WRITTEN ABOVE ALL TO TEACH DOCTRINE

- A. Some mistakenly think the Psalms are mostly for devotion and that they only incidentally communicate doctrine.
 - 1. The Psalms are intended to be more doctrinal than devotional; they are not merely the song book of Israel.
 - a. We err when we try to separate doctrine from devotion or to remove devotion from doctrine
 - b. We casually, perhaps foolishly compartmentalize aspects of the word, the work, and worship of God
 - c. Are there five separate and distinct acts of worship? No. Singing has elements of prayer and petition to God; communion has elements of confession, teaching, prayer, and praise; giving has elements of profession, proclamation, and glorifying God; prayer has elements of teaching and doctrinal instruction
 - d. There are crossover elements and multiple purposes in every part of our worship
 - e. Likewise with the Psalms; not only does one under-utilize the Psalms when he sees them as devotional only, he also demonstrates that he does not understand why they were written and read in Bible times
 - 2. The Psalms are not about what the writers say to God, but what God had already said to humankind.
 - a. The Psalms are designed for teaching, just as our hymns are for instruction - Col. 3:16-17
 - b. The Psalms were one third of the scriptures used by the first century Christians
 - c. Heb. 8:5, 9:23; 1Cor. 10:6; Luke 24:44-49
 - 3. The Psalms teach and establish authority by the same means as the doctrine of Christ in the NT

- a. Explicit statement - 1Tim. 3:14-17; Matt. 5:17-18; Gal. 3:8
 - b. Divinely approved example - apostolic example
 - c. Divine implication - The Psalms teach us that some things are right or wrong and have always been right or wrong regardless of the dispensation and covenant.
4. Col. 2:14 and Eph. 2:14-15 do not void the authority of the Psalms; they only speak to the Divinely imposed and revealed limits on the Psalms and all other OT texts
- a. We must learn to distinguish between the Old Testament and the Old Covenant - Rom. 15:4; 2Tim. 3:15
 - b. The Old Testament argues for the end of the Old Covenant
 - c. Ex. 34:35; Jer. 31:31-34; Zech. 8:8; Isa. 54:13; 2Cor. 3:7-18

Conclusion:

- A. The purpose of the Psalms is summed up in teaching man about himself and His God - Psalm 39:4-8