

Talks - Psalms Breakdown – myfishbites.com

Credit – David Pawson, 'Unlocking The Bible', Collins London, 2003. Links checked in May 2019

Psalms Breakdown – (with help from David Pawson, 'Unlocking The Bible')

The word Psalms literally means 'to pluck' or 'twang' as in the strings used to accompany the Psalms. They are incredibly poetic. One of my often-used replies to those who oppose the use of rap in the Bible are the Psalms. Both are poetry set to music. Martin Luther said, 'In the Psalms we look into the heart of every saint.' It's the one part of the OT that everyone can identify with in the varied seasons of life. Luther also described the Psalms as 'The Bible within the Bible.' The Psalms took 1000 years to write and are Israel's hymn and prayer book – but ones we too can use today. In Hebrew the word used for 'Psalms' means Songs of Praise.

G Campbell Morgan (Living Messages of the Books of the Bible, Ch 19) says, "The Hebrew word translated worship literally means prostration. It is used to indicate that prostration which recognizes the supremacy of the One before Whom the worshipper bows, and therefore indicates the attitude of submission in the presence of supremacy." ([click here for link](#))

Psalm 45.1 says, 'My heart is stirred by a noble theme as I recite my verses for the King; my tongue is the pen of a skillful writer.' Sounds suspiciously like someone carefully crafting their words poetically for the glory of God and then using their tongue and intonation skillfully to deliver the rhymes to music...

As David Pawson writes, "Poetry is more easily remembered than prose, especially when set to music. It touches the intuitive and artistic part of the brain, so poems... may be remembered decades later, while lectures are forgotten next week. For this reason we generally learn our theology from hymns and choruses which is why it's important to make sure the songs used in worship have Bible-based content. Poetry is used in greeting cards because it is a more effective way of moving the heart of the recipient. It can evoke warm emotions, while the same sentiments expressed in prose would leave the reader unmoved." (p324-325)

*They walked down the lane together
The sky was full of stars
Together they reached the farmyard gate
He lifted for her the bars
She neither smiled nor thanked him
Indeed she knew not how
For he was just a farmer's boy
And she was a Jersey cow!*

"Poetry touches the heart, the mind and the will by making words beautiful as well as meaningful... There are three basic features of poetry that make the words beautiful for us: rhyme, rhythm and repetition." (p326)

Rhyme – start of Myfishbites Psalm 103 rewrite: (or read 'Jack and Jill')

Praise the Lord, with all of my soul
With everything I have, Lord, you're in control
My whole being praises you cos you're all-seeing
Day to day, in all you do, your kindness is exceeding
Forgiving all my sin, mistakes and all my evil
Cleansing me within, my inner state is healed
You've saved me from the fiery hell
Your love and mercy, unparalleled
You satisfy my heart's desire with gracious holy fire
Renew, restore, my Spirit soars, like eagles, I fly higher

OR

Jack and Jill went up the hill
To fetch a pail of water
Jack fell down and broke his crown
And Jill came tumbling after

Rhythm – eg Psalm 23: (4/4, 4/3 rhythm)

The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want (*4 beats*)
He makes me down to lie (*3 beats*)
In pastures green, he leadeth me (*4 beats*)
The quiet waters by (*3 beats*)
Or a song: (8,6,8,6 syllables)

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound (*8 syllables*)
That saved a wretch like me (*6 syllables*)
I once was lost, but now am found (*8 syllables*)
Was blind but now I see (*6 syllables*)
Or the same song rhyming badly:

Amazing grace, how sweet the noise
That saved a little wretch like me
I once was feeling lost, but now I have been found
Was blind but now my eyes are better

Repetition

Some Psalms say things over and over (often called a 'refrain') For example:

Psalm 136, has the refrain 'His love endures forever' which is said after each verse (26 times).

Wonder – Mike Bickle, 'The Seven Longings of the Human Heart –

[\(Click here for link\)](#)

"There is a craving in our spirit to be fascinated, to marvel and be awestruck and filled with wonder. The entertainment industry has identified this longing and made much profit from it. When God reveals God to the human spirit we experience "divine entertainment" at its highest.

David's heart was preoccupied with God while his hands were occupied with leading the nation. Without having a sense of awe, we live aimlessly and in boredom. A spiritually bored believer is weak and vulnerable to Satan. A fascinated believer is strong and equipped to face temptation."

Story – we went to the Lake District, a mountainous area in England. Day after day as we climbed up the mountains and looked down over incredible views, we were awe struck and amazed at God. And he made the mountains – how much bigger is God!

Poems are much better for worship than writing or prose, they also point to wonder beyond us, even the simplest rhymes can do this:

*Twinkle twinkle little star
How I wonder what you are
Up above the world so high
Like a diamond in the sky*

David Pawson writes (p330) – "Hymns, songs, psalms and choruses help us express something of the wonder and glory of God in a way that scientific forms of expression cannot. Poetry is visual as well as verbal. It paints pictures in the mind."

Psalm 42 – As the deer pants for water, so my soul longs for you (God).

Here we get a mental image of a deep panting, needing water. The Psalmist then links this to the feeling we can have for God.

Sound and sense

Hebrew poetry focuses on the sense, not the sound. This works so well as it can then be easily translated across to any language, unlike English poetry with its focus on sound.

Musicality of Psalms – the Psalms are poems set to music, in much the way that Wesley wrote and set his writing to the tunes of the day. Very often we hear of secular music, but I often feel that barring rare exceptions, there is no secular music only secular lyrics. If you listen to the popular contemporary worship artists, you'd often be hard pushed to tell their songs apart from other bands, apart from their lyrics.

The Psalms provide one pattern of worship. Spontaneous song is very important as we'll see from the Psalm itself, but planned worship is equally important – standing the test of time and lyrical interrogation. The themes of the Psalms cover corporate, personal, God

magnifying and personally challenging themes that can all help us in worship. There is no doubt there's a tremendous power in corporate worship.

I'm always reminded of Ezra bringing out the Scriptures in Nehemiah 8 and corporately reading – we find that “all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.” There was a power in the corporate worship that we still find today. More and more songs are being sung about the awesome-ness of who God is. The reason is because Jesus is increasingly drawing / wooing his bride!

I do remember a certain speaker coming to the church and saying we needed to sing more songs as ‘we’ and not ‘I’. A quick look through both the Psalms and our song list revealed plenty of both ‘we’ and ‘I’... But there is a corporate power in singing together as noted by David Pawson talking about his children singing happy birthday to him together. In this he says that the magic of the singing happy birthday would have been lost if they hadn't all sung together as family. There is a power in worship when we sing together – just listen to the live tracks off any worship album (eg 10,000 Reasons by Matt Redman)

‘Praying together in agreement’ – Matthew 18.19 talks about the power of God made manifest where one or two agree. The Greek word for agreement used is ‘sumphoneo’ from where we get the word ‘symphony’. Its literal meaning is being in harmony with someone. As we've written elsewhere:

“The Greek reveals that this kind of agreement is a deep unity – a calling together by God in unity. It speaks of a picture of an orchestra coming together to play the same tune. The power of the Holy Spirit is in such agreement. Without this agreement, the presence of the Holy Spirit is unable to come so powerfully among God's people.”

God loves poetry, music, song, emotion etc. Poetry is used in the Psalms and in the prophetic books of the Bible too.

Zephaniah 3.17 (as seen in Leah's song, 'Lead me like a lamb') says, “The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.”

(Pawson p340) states, “So God is musical. Music... is part of what it means to be made in the image of God. So when God addresses us with poetry we know that he is communicating his feelings from his heart to our hearts... Understanding Hebrew poetry can be a key to understanding the very heart of God.”

David, musicians and the Psalms

2 Samuel 23.1 we read that David was the ‘sweet singer (or psalmist) of Israel.’

Of the Psalms, David's name is by 73 Psalms. Acts 4.25-26 quotes the Royal and Messianic Psalm 2, saying that God spoke it through David. Hebrews 4.7 then confirms that God spoke through David in writing Psalm 95.

In David's life, we see the mix of the warrior, the prophetic and the musician. Early in his life, David learned the harp, playing for Saul

1 Samuel 16.23 – Whenever the spirit from God came upon Saul, David would take his harp and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him.

Amos speaks of David in Amos 6.5 when warning of the complacency and laziness of Israel. We too are warned not to make our music just a pointless exercise while forgetting about God's kingdom, justice and the Gospel.

"You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments."

The Sons of Korah and the Sons of Asaph wrote Psalms. In Numbers 16, Korah (a Levite and 3rd son of Esau) was consumed by fire from God for opposing Moses. However, his sons didn't take part in this rebellion and subsequently wrote 11 Psalms (42-49, 84, 85, 87). They were singers in the Levitical priesthood (2 Chronicles 20.19). In Psalm 49 they write, play and sing:

My mouth will speak words of wisdom; the utterance from my heart will give understanding. I will turn my ear to a proverb; with the harp I will expound my riddle.

Studies have found that Asaph was David's musical director at David's Temple of Meeting and at Solomon's Temple. 1 Chronicles 16.5 says, "Asaph was the chief, Zechariah second, then Jeiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, Obed-Edom and Jeiel. They were to play the lyres and harps, Asaph was to sound the cymbals." (A sign that a good drummer can also be a good worship leader!)

Asaph wrote Psalm 50 and Psalms 73-83. [Some also think he may have written Psalm 94](#) The sons of Asaph were also Levites. 1 Chronicles 25.2 reveals that Asaph was in charge of five of his sons (or family) in prophesying under the supervision of the King. In 2 Chronicles 20.14 we find that the spirit of the Lord came upon one of the family of Asaph, Jahaziel and prophesied through him.

Today we should read the Psalms out loud, singing or shouting them as directed. Other Psalms call us to bow down, to lift our hands, to clap and to dance. We need to open our mouths to receive and praise – and run to him!

Psalm 138.2 – I will bow down towards your holy temple and will praise your name for your love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word.

Psalm 134.2 – Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the LORD.

Psalm 47.1 – Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy.

Psalm 149.3 – Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with tambourine and harp.

Psalm 34 – Open your mouth and taste, open your eyes and see how good God is. Blessed are you who run to him.

And what about the word Judah? The root of the word 'Judah' means praised or 'let God be praised'.

“The name Judah is a combination of two elements. The first element is the commonly accepted abbreviated form of YHWH. The second part of the name Judah comes from yada meaning to confess, praise, give thanks. HAW Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament reports that ‘the primary meaning of this root is “to acknowledge or confess sin, God’s character and works, or man’s character.”’ ([click for link to abarim-publications](#))

Derek Prince says, “Worship is the act by which we are joined to the Lord in one spirit. That is why worship is the highest activity of human beings. Again, when we are joined to the Lord in worship, we begin to bring forth (or birth) the things that God wants brought forth. Worship is not an appendix to the Christian life; it is not a little addition to services. It is the culmination. It is the confirmation.” (of the union to God)

Conclusion

This is why the Psalms are so important. They are rich in meaning for us, they relate to our everyday lives and they help us in times of struggle, pain, joy and in every season of life!

Get reading Psalms today and make them personal. I often read Psalm 91 and personalize it for myself, family, church and friends.

And why not start writing your own words for Psalms, or your own cries out to God.

There are some examples on myfishbites if they help inspire (Psalm 103, Psalm 91, Psalm 131, as well as lyrics from Acts 2 and Romans 8 / Philipians 3 / Ephesians 2. They may even inspire you to do things better!

You can find these under Resources > Hip-Hop > Church Lyrics