

Worship *in the* Psalms



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Psalms 90:1, 2; 100:1–5; 73; 49; 141:2; 20:3; 54:6; 78:1–8.*

Memory Text: “How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God” (*Psalms 84:1, 2, NIV*).

The Hebrew word translated “Psalms” comes from a root word that means “to sing with instrumental accompaniment.” Thus, the Psalms were songs, songs that were intricately part of the worship of Israel. Though we have the lyrics (the Psalms themselves), we do not have the music. How fascinating it would be to hear these songs, in their original tongue, sung with the music that first accompanied them.

The Psalms themselves are rich and deep, covering a wide range of topics and emotions, dealing with everything from the corporate history of Israel to the songwriter’s most intimate and personal pain. In that sense, they speak to us because, though as a church we are part of the long history that goes back to Israel, we also are individuals with our own private pain. It is doubtful that any of us could not relate at some time or another to some of the agony expressed in the Psalms. At the same time, though, it is crucial that we reach out and grasp the hope expressed in them.

This week we will look at the Psalms and some of the themes found in them and how these themes relate to the question of worship and what it means for us today.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 13.*

Worship the Lord, Our Maker

The psalms of praise describe who God is and why He is worthy of worship. They declare His greatness, and call worshippers to come with joyful adoration to honor Him.

What do the following examples have in common? *Pss. 90:1, 2; 95:1–6; 100:1–5.*

Psalm 19 is another song in praise of God as Creator. What is its essential message, and why is that especially important for us today, at a time when many argue that we exist only as the result of natural and unguided forces that created us by chance alone?

Notice how the psalmist suddenly shifts from discussing God's glory revealed in the heavens to His revealed word. This abrupt transition is intentional. Read *John 1:1–3; Col. 1:16, 17; Heb. 1:1–3*. What great truth is the psalmist emphasizing?

The same God who spoke the world into existence also gave the moral, physical, and social laws to govern the human family. The Old Testament Scriptures clearly identify God as both the Creator of the world and the Giver of the Written Law. The New Testament writers see Jesus Christ as the Creator and the Giver of the Law as well as the Word made flesh, who lived among His creatures in order to reveal the Father to them and to die as their Substitute. Thus, He alone is worthy of adoration and worship.

Hence, we see in the Psalms one of the foundational principles of worship as seen in the first angel's message (*Rev. 14:7*). We worship the Lord because He is our Creator, and directly tied to His role as Creator is His role as our Redeemer (*Rev. 14:6*). Creator and Redeemer—if these are not reasons to praise and worship Him, what are?

How can you seek to get to know the Lord better through His created works?

Judgment From His Sanctuary

While many psalms were written for public worship, many others are prayers of personal distress and suffering. These laments typically contain a description of the problem, the sufferer's plea for help, and an affirmation of, and reasons for, the writer's trust in God.

In Psalm 73, the petitioner is angry that the wicked prosper and are at ease while he suffers injustice.

Read the psalmist's complaint in Psalm 73. What happened that brought about a change in his attitude toward the problem? What message can we take from that for ourselves, as Seventh-day Adventists, with our understanding of Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary and the truths about God and the plan of salvation that this ministry reveals? See *Dan. 7:9, 10, 13, 14, 25, 26*.

Judgment in the Psalms, as in the Bible as a whole, is a double-edged sword: deserved punishment on the wicked and the defense of the oppressed and humble (*Pss. 7:9, 10; 9:7–12; 75:2; 94:1–3, 20–22; 98:9*). In Psalm 68:24, the wicked are pictured as watching God enter the sanctuary in a grand processional. God's throne, representing justice and mercy, is symbolized in the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary. Thus, the sanctuary, the place of worship, becomes a haven of refuge for the distressed.

Here, too, we see the theme of judgment echoed in the first angel's message: "Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come . . ." (*Rev. 14:7*). One of the things about God, about what makes Him so worthy of our worship, is that we can indeed trust that in the end, not only will judgment come but it will be just and righteous, nothing like the fallible and imperfect justice meted out even in the best human courts. From the death of Abel, whose blood cried out from the ground (*Gen. 4:10*), up through today and on to the last day of fallen human history, the crimes, the unfairness, and the inequities of this world do indeed cry out for justice. The good news is that we can trust that, in His time and way, God will make all things right, however hard it is for us to see and understand now (*see 1 Cor. 4:5*).

Have you seen injustice? Have you been the victim of injustice? What are ways that you can learn to trust in God, to trust in the promise of ultimate and righteous justice that is so lacking in the world now?

“Like the Beasts That Perish”

As we saw yesterday, and as we all know too well, so much unfairness and injustice reign in this world. A relatively small percentage of people live in luxury, in contrast to vast multitudes who struggle to barely eke out an existence. The gap between the rich and poor seems steadily to grow; and what makes it worse is that so often the rich get richer by exploiting the poor. All through the Bible, the Lord has warned about this exploitation and injustice. Those who are guilty of such exploitation, and who do not repent and turn away, will have a lot to answer for on Judgment Day.

Read Psalm 49. How does it tie in with what we read yesterday? What is the basic message of this psalm? Where do we find the gospel here? What ultimate and final hope is presented?

It is so easy to get caught up in the things of this world, especially if you have many things in this world as do the rich. Yet, as the psalm says, and as we all should know by now, the things of this world are so fleeting, so temporary, so easily lost. Overnight, everything you have worked for, everything you have struggled to attain, everything that is important to you, can be taken away, lost, destroyed. We all live on the edge of a precipice, at least in this life. Fortunately, as this psalm shows, and as so much of the rest of the Bible attests, this life is not all that there is.

Focus on verses 7–9 of this psalm. Given the immediate context, what is it saying? How does it show how all of us, rich or poor, are ultimately dependent upon Christ for salvation?

Do you ever find yourself jealous of those who have more than you do? If so, why is it so important to surrender those feelings to the Lord? How do such emotions interfere with your spiritual life, with your relationship to God, and your faith in general? How can focusing on Jesus, the Cross, and salvation help free you from the tyranny of jealousy?

Worship and the Sanctuary

“Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice” (Ps. 141:2). What imagery is being used here? What is this verse pointing to?

The entire Old Testament sanctuary service centered on the concept of sacrifice. However much the enemy of souls perverted it, even to the point where people were sacrificing their own children in order (they believed) to appease an angry god (or gods), the sacrificial system was intended to point to the death of Jesus on behalf of all humanity. It was to show the futility of our own works to save us; it was to show that the cost of sin was the life of an innocent victim; it was to show that the Lord had a plan whereby sinners could be forgiven, cleansed, and accepted by the Lord through His grace.

It is no wonder, then, that many of the psalms, so central to Israel’s worship, would use images and examples from the sanctuary service. See *Pss. 20:3, 43:4, 51:19, 54:6, 118:27, 134:2, 141:2.*

Dwell on the sanctuary service: the sacrifice of the animals, the ministry of the priests, the furniture in the courtyard, and the Holy and Most Holy Places. What sacred truths can we draw from this earthly and temporary system about the work of Jesus on our behalf? Why should these truths be so central to our worship of the Lord?

Read Psalm 40:6–8 and Hebrews 10:1–13. How does Paul connect Psalm 40:8 with the sacrificial system?

The author’s point is that it is through Christ, not through the death of animals, that we have salvation. Only through Christ is there true forgiveness of sin. The whole earthly system was merely a precursor to what Jesus would do on behalf of all humanity. He was telling his audience, most likely Jewish believers in Jesus, that they needed to look away from the earthly system and instead focus their attention and worship on Jesus. In other words, though the whole sanctuary service was to point to Christ, as believers they needed to move away from the symbols toward the reality, which was Jesus and His ministry for them in the heavenly sanctuary after His atoning death.

How can we be sure that we do not make worship and the things of worship ends in themselves? How can we make sure that every aspect of our worship points us toward Jesus and His work on our behalf?

Lest We Forget!

Three of the longer psalms, Psalms 78, 105, and 106, are great hymns that were to be sung or recited to remind Israel of God's leading in the past.

Read Psalm 78:1–8. According to this passage, why does God want the people to remember their history? Read also Deut. 6:6–9, 1 Cor. 10:11. How can we take that same principle and apply it to ourselves in our own context and experience, which is so different from theirs?

One of the ways God reveals Himself is through history. Yet, each generation must experience Him anew based on that history. For that reason, not only music but the proclamation of the Word of God in worship is vital to both old and new generations to keep before them His past leading. Psalm 78 is a warning that history must not repeat itself, but at the same time it is a heartwarming reminder of God's gracious dealings with His wayward people. There seems to be an urgency in the imperative promise, "Telling to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and His strength" (*vs. 4, NKJV*). Psalm 105:2 calls us to "Sing psalms to Him" and "Talk of all His wondrous works" (*NKJV; emphasis added*).

The longest poem in the psalter, Psalm 119, contains the frequent refrain, "Teach me thy statutes," indicating the importance of Scripture as the basis for teaching godly living and righteousness. Paul echoes this thought when he instructs the young preacher, Timothy, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction" (*2 Tim. 3:16, NKJV*).

Paul charges Timothy to "preach the word" (*2 Tim. 4:2, NKJV*). To neglect proclaiming the Word in worship is to dilute the power of the gospel to reach hearts, to change lives, and to enrich the worship experience of believers.

How often have you had the experience of the Lord doing something wonderful and miraculous in your life, only to quickly forget it and show fear and lack of faith when a new crisis arose? Whether in corporate worship or in your own private worship, how can you learn to keep fresh in your mind God's leading in your life? Why is this so important to do?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Creation,” pp. 44–51, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “Poetry and Song,” pp. 159–168, in *Education*; “Forgetfulness,” pp. 107–115, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8.

“The Book of Psalms fulfills a unique role in the Bible. . . . [The Psalms] function in the Scriptures as the heartbeat of Israel’s religion. In this book of prayers the covenant people found their stairway to heaven. It reaches from the lowest depths of human agony and suffering to the highest joys of communion with God. Laments and cries of despair exchange with hymns of thanksgiving and praise. . . . This living interchange between man and God is perhaps the deeper reason why the Book of Psalms has been cherished as the invaluable jewel in the Hebrew Bible by seekers after God in all ages.” Further, they are a “disclosure of God’s own heart. . . . They stand as inspired examples of how God desires us all to respond by faith to the authentic revelations of Himself and of His deeds in the books of Moses.”—Hans K. LaRondelle, *Deliverance in the Psalms* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: First Impressions, 1983), pp. 3, 4.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** It is one thing to trust in the justice of God’s ultimate judgment at the end of time—we have to trust in that hope and promise. At the same time, does this mean that we do not need to work for justice and judgment now because we know that it will ultimately come by God? How do we strike a right balance between seeking justice now and knowing that one day it will come?
- 2** Discuss more the question at the end of Wednesday’s lesson regarding worship and the forms of worship in church. How is it possible that things such as music, preaching, liturgy, and so forth could become ends in themselves as opposed to being the means of pointing us toward the Lord? So often, we can mistake the symbols for the reality behind the symbols. How can we protect ourselves against this danger in our own worship services?

Following the Light

by MOHAMMED

I live in an area of Nigeria where most people follow a religion other than Christianity. I studied in a religious school where teachers taught mostly the language and teachings of our religion. When I finished studying in that school, I wanted to receive a more practical education in a government primary school. My father reluctantly agreed. But when I asked to continue studying in the secondary school, he refused, saying it was too secular. So, I found work and secretly started saving money to continue my studies on my own.

One day as I was listening to the radio, I found an English-language station called Adventist World Radio. I liked the programs and began listening regularly. In time I realized that Jesus is more than a prophet; He is the way of salvation. I called the radio station and asked how I could learn more about Jesus. I wanted to become a Christian.

The people at the station were cautious, but they sensed my sincerity and gave me the name of a man I could study with. I had many questions, and we studied for hours at a time. I realized that salvation doesn't come by works but is a gift of God through Jesus. I accepted Jesus' sacrifice for me and asked to be baptized.

When I told my father that I had become a Christian, he was angry and told me that if he ever saw me again, he would kill me. Sadly, I left my father's house and went to live with the man who had become my spiritual father.

I enrolled in secondary school. But when the teachers learned that I was a Christian, they made life difficult for me. I had to transfer to a school in the Christian part of the city.

I want to finish school and return home to tell my family that Jesus isn't just a prophet. He is God, and He wants to be their Savior too. I know that this is dangerous, but Jesus died for me. How can I do less? So many in my country need to know the truth that I've found. And who better to tell them than someone who has lived among them and knows how they think? If I go as a Christian rather than as a convert from my former religion, I may be safe.

I am grateful that my Christian brothers and sisters helped me find the true faith through Adventist World Radio and a Christian education. I look forward to serving as a Global Mission pioneer one day soon. Your mission offerings help support many evangelistic efforts to reach people who, like me, are searching but have not yet found the light of life in Jesus.

MOHAMMED is preparing to serve God as a Global Mission pioneer in his homeland of Nigeria.