

Hermeneutics
Session 14
Psalms

Hermeneutics Outline

1. Introduction: What is hermeneutics and why should we care?
2. What is the Bible and how did we get it?
3. Why so many translations? And which is best?
4. What is the history of Hermeneutics?
5. What are the different hermeneutical approaches, and which is best?
6. What are the key principles of good hermeneutics?
7. NT Genres: Epistles
8. NT Genres: Gospels
9. NT Genres: Parables
10. OT Genres: Hebrew Historical Narrative
11. NT Genres: Acts
12. OT Genres: Law
13. OT Genres: Prophets
14. OT Genres: Psalms
15. OT Genres: Wisdom
16. NT Genres: Revelation
17. What are the tools we have available to us today to study the Bible?
18. Practicing Hermeneutics: Big Idea Study

Genres: Psalms

How do we properly understand and apply Psalms?

Outline:

- **What are the Psalms?**
- **What are the hermeneutical challenges to the Psalms?**
- **What are some important hermeneutical rules for the Psalms?**
- **Practice: Psalms**

Opening Questions:

1. What are the Psalms? What do you think of?
2. What kind of modern genre would you liken them to? How are they different from other genres of Scripture?
3. Who wrote them? Why? What were they used for?
4. How have you used the Psalms? How have they been a help to you personally?

What are the Psalms?

What are the Psalms?

- Assortment of Hebrew prayers and hymns
- Psalms were functional for Israel: used in Worship
- Some used for individual worship; Some used primarily for corporate worship - in the temple, etc., and then became more widely used

“The psalms were eventually collected into groups called “books.” There are five such books:

- Book 1: Psalms 1-41
- Book 2: Psalms 42-72
- Book 3: Psalms 73-89
- Book 4: Psalms 90-106
- Book 5: Psalms 107-250

What are the Psalms?

Authorship and Date

- Most Psalms are difficult to know their date.
- Authorship: according to the titles (which were not original and are therefore not inspired):
 - David wrote about half: 73
 - Sons of Asaph and Korah wrote several (“sons of” is Hebraism for an ongoing school of musicians”)
 - Moses: 1 (Psalm 90)
 - Solomon: 2 (Psalms 72 and 127)

Summary History

The Psalms were written throughout the history of the Israelite people and used for corporate and individual worship. Upon returning from exile, the Israelites rebuilt the temple, and the psalms were formed into a collection (think modern hymnal).

What are the Psalms?

Types of Psalms

How would you define each? When might they be used today in worship, individually or corporately? (We will dig deeper into some of these individually later)

1. Laments

1. More than 60

2. Individual (3, 22, 31, 39, 42, 57, 71, 88, 120, 139, 142)

3. corporate (12, 44, 80, 94, 137)

2. Thanksgiving

1. individual (18, 30, 32, 34, 40, 66, 92, 116, 118, 138)

2. corporate (65, 67, 75, 107, 124, 136)

3. Hymns of praise

1. (8, 19, 104, 148, 66, 100, 111, 114, 149, 33, 103, 113, 117, 145-147)

4. Salvation-History Psalms

1. (78, 105, 106, 135, 136)

5. Psalms of Celebration and Affirmation

1. Covenant renewal liturgies (Psalms 50 and 81)

2. Davidic Covenant Psalms: (Psalms 89 and 132)

3. Royal Psalms: (2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 101, 110, 144)

4. Enthronement Psalms (24, 29, 47, 93, 95-99)

5. Songs of Zion: (46, 48, 76, 84, 87, 122)

6. Wisdom Psalms: (36, 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128, 133)

7. Songs of Trust: (11, 16, 23, 27, 62, 63, 91, 121, 125, 131)

What are the Psalms?

Imprecatory Psalms

- Imprecatory parts almost always found in Laments
- Example: Psalm 137:7-9

How do these verses help us understand imprecatory Psalms?

- Deuteronomy 32:35, Romans 12:19
- Deuteronomy 28:53-57
- Ephesians 4:26-27
- Romans 12:21

Note: the meaning of hate: Psalm 139:22

Hebrew word can mean:

- “Despise”
- “To be unwilling or unable to put up with” or “reject” (Malachi 1:3)
- Keep in mind with any difficult passage/word that further research could resolve it.

What are the hermeneutical challenges to Psalms?

Psalms are Hebrew poetry and use Hebrew poetic features (like the three types of parallelism that we talked about when studying Prophets). The Psalms were poetic songs written/sung to God and about God.

Discussion Questions:

1. What would you say was the original purpose of the Psalms? Authorial intent?
2. What do you think of could be the hermeneutical challenges for us in reading ancient poetry/songs?
3. What could be some hermeneutical challenges considering that Psalms were written/sung to God?
4. How is it still “God’s Word” to us today?
5. Should we be able to find propositional truths and doctrines about God in the Psalms? Why/why not?
6. What is the best way for us to use Psalms today?
7. How should we NOT use Psalms today?

What are some important hermeneutical rules for Psalms?

1. Understand their nature: ancient Hebrew poems and songs of various types, many of which are unfamiliar to us today (except for the Psalms themselves of course).
2. Understand their function in Israel.

Three Points from Fee and Stuart

1. Hebrew poetry, by its very nature, was addressed to the mind through the heart.
 1. Acknowledging the Hebrew poetic styles (like parallelism); don't over exegete.
 2. Consider opening of Psalm 19
2. The psalms themselves are musical poems.
 1. What is the intent of the musical poem? How would you read differently than an epistle?
 2. Consider psalm 51:5
3. The vocabulary of poetry is purposefully metaphorical.
 1. What is the intent of the metaphor?
 1. Psalm 23
 1. What is the purpose of the metaphor?
 2. How could we take to TOO literally?

What are some important hermeneutical rules for Psalms?

Psalms as literature: distinct literary features (from Fee and Stuart)

1. Psalms are of several different types.
2. Each Psalm is also characterized by its formal structure.
3. Each type of Psalm was intended to have a given function in the life of Israel.
4. There are also various patterns within the Psalms: Acrostics (Psalm 119 for example), repetitions of words and sounds, arrangements.
5. Each psalm has its own integrity as a literary unit.
 1. Read each verse/line of a psalm in context
 2. Example: Psalm 51:16

Question:

Which of these literary features stands out to you? Why would it be important to keep this in mind hermeneutically?

Genres: Psalms

How do we properly understand and apply Psalms?

Summary Answer:

The Psalms are an assortment of Hebrew prayers and hymns that were written over a long period of Hebrew history. They were written and used for corporate and individual worship; the goal (as with modern poetry and songs) being to connect to the heart and emotions of the reader/singer/worshipper. Many (almost half) were written by David; other authors we know of include the “Sons of Asaph” (their school of musicians), Solomon (author of two), and Moses (author of one). Upon returning from exile, the Israelites rebuilt the temple, and the psalms were formed into a collection (think modern hymnal). There are five main types of psalms (Lament, Thanksgiving, Hymns of Praise, Salvation-History, Celebration and Affirmation), each having their own distinct characteristics.

The hermeneutical challenge of the Psalms for the modern reader is largely related to:

1. The fact that they are Hebrew poetry, and that the modern reader is largely unfamiliar with the unique characteristics of ancient Hebrew poetry (not to mention the fact that many of these characteristics are completely lost in translating to another language).
2. The fact that the Psalms were written/sung to God about God, and therefore are unique as a genre in how they are “God’s Word” to us.

The modern reader will then do well to seek to grow in understanding of Hebrew poetry in general and of the characteristics of the particular Psalm (of the five main types of Psalms) they are reading. The modern reader will also do well to use the Psalms today in the same way they were intended to be used by the author: for individual or corporate worship, being careful not to ‘over-exegete’ or to try to form unintended propositional/doctrinal truths about God from the Psalms.

Practice

As time permits, read and discuss Psalms from different types:

1. In light of the type of psalm this is, what would you say is its value for us today?
2. What are some of the things that you learned from our study today that helps you with this psalm?
3. What additional questions/comments do you have?

1. Laments

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2. corporate (12, 44, 80, 94, 137)

2. Thanksgiving

1. individual (18, 30, 32, 34, 40, 66, 92, 116, 118, 138)
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4. Salvation-History Psalms

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5. Psalms of Celebration and Affirmation

1. Covenant renewal liturgies (Psalms 50 and 81)
2. Dravidic Covenant Psalms: (Psalms 89 and 132)
3. Royal Psalms: (2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 101, 110, 144)
4. Enthronement Psalms (24, 29, 47, 93, 95-99)
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Closing Questions

Questions:

1. What stood out to you most from this discussion?
2. Closing thoughts? Comments? Questions?