

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have an opportunity to learn to know the Bible. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. Today we introduce the book of PSALMS - PART 1. We will learn about the Psalms as a part of biblical poetry, its characteristics, its origin and its division.

### **POINT 1. THE BOOK OF PSALMS IS A PART OF BIBLICAL POETRY**

Biblical poetry is found in the books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs, but also in parts of the Prophets and even in the sayings of Jesus Christ.

#### **First. In the Psalms man speaks to God.**

The Psalms are a means of expressing some of the deepest and highest thoughts and feelings of the human mind and heart. The source of the Psalms is the believing poet's heart, which is moved by the Holy Spirit to seek God and to fellowship with God. The poets do this through worship, praise and prayer in the midst of a great variety of emotional experiences. Their emotional experiences may be fear or confidence, anxiety or peace, despair or hope, sorrow or joy, doubt or faith and hate or love in the face of opposition from God's enemies or in view of the various circumstances that God controls in a sovereign way. The Psalms are the responses of the believing poets to God's goodness and grace or to God's discipline and judgement. Whether the psalmist is occupied by a mournful or joyous theme, in the Psalms he always expresses himself *as being in the presence of the living God*.

#### **One. Some Psalms contain a personal as well as a historical element.**

In the Psalms, the poets sing of their own historical circumstances and of their own personal experiences. This is evident from the titles and the contents of some of the Psalms. In these Psalms, the personal experiences of the poets are most prominent.

#### **Two. Some Psalms also have a representative as well as a universal element.**

The experiences of the poets are not only personal and historical, but also representative and universal in character. Deep in their hearts, the poets are conscious of their solidarity with mankind in general and with the people of God in particular. They feel the pulse of the communal life of man in general and of the people of God in particular. The songs that are born of this consciousness of solidarity with other people. They are songs that interpret the deep thoughts and feelings, not only of the poets themselves, but of people in general. But more specifically, the Psalms interpret the deep thoughts and feelings of God's people everywhere in the world and at all times in history. That is why the Psalms have become the embodiment of the worship, praises, prayers, petitions and lamentations of God's people in both the Old and New Testaments. In these Psalms, the communal life of Israel and of the Christian Church are most prominent.

#### **Three. Some Psalms have a Messianic element.**

The believing poets feel that they are united to their glorious Head, the Messiah, who suffers for them and suffers with them. They also regard the Messiah as the source of their salvation and joy. Therefore, we can sometimes hear the Messiah, Jesus Christ, speak through the Psalms. For example, in Psalm 22, the Messiah sings a plaintive song. He feels forsaken by God and despised by people. And in Psalm 110, the God of the Bible sings a song of victory about the Messiah. The Messiah will sit at his right hand until he has subjected all his enemies under his feet. In these Psalms, the humiliated and exalted Christ is most prominent.

#### **Second. In the Psalms God speaks to man.**

The Psalms, as it were, originate with God, because God is the Creator of the poets as well as the One who inspires and controls their thoughts and emotions. All the Psalms have their fountain in God, because the believing poets are living in union with God and their songs are the songs of the community of God's people. The source of the Psalms is the heart of *believing* poets, who are moved by the Holy Spirit to seek God and to fellowship with God. The Psalms consists of both didactic and lyric poetry of the believing poets. In the didactic Psalms like Psalm 1, 2, 19, 106 and 119, God gives instruction through the poets and addresses himself to their understanding. In the lyric Psalms like Psalm 22, 40, 51, 62 and 139, God reveals himself through the emotions and spiritual experiences of the poets and directs himself to their hearts. Thus, *in the Psalms, God speak to the mind as well as to the heart of people*.

### **POINT 2. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BOOK OF PSALMS**

#### **First. The combination and repetition of Psalms.**

##### **One. Combinations of Psalms.**

Although the Hebrew text and its translations in Greek and Latin show that there are 150 Psalms, there are differences how they are counted. On the one hand, Psalm 9 and 10 in the Hebrew text is Psalm 9 in the translations. Also Psalm

114 and 115 in the Hebrew text is Psalm 113 in the translations. On the other hand, Psalm 116 in the Hebrew text is Psalm 114 and 115 in the translations. And Psalm 147 in the Hebrew text is Psalm 146 and 147 in the translations. In 36 Hebrew texts, Psalm 42 and 43 correctly form one Psalm, as is shown by the identical situation and the closing verse.

#### Two. Repetitions of Psalms.

Some Psalms or parts of Psalms are repeated twice in the book of Psalms. Psalm 14 is identical with Psalm 53. Psalm 40:13-17 is identical to Psalm 70. Psalm

57:7-11 and Psalm 60:5-12 is identical with Psalm 108. Psalm 115:4-11 is identical with Psalm 135:15-20. And there is also much identity between Psalm 31:1-4 and Psalm 71:1-3.

This shows that the book of the Psalms was a liturgical book, which combined songs to be used in the worship services. Other clear combinations can be seen in Psalm 19 verse 1-6 with verse 7-14, Psalm 24 verse 1-6 with verse 7-10, and Psalm 27 verse 1-6 with verse 7-14. The way in which songs were combined to be used in the worship service is illustrated in 1 Chronicles 16:8-36, which is a combination of Psalm 105, 96 and 106.

#### Second. The additional notes to the Psalms.

Most Psalms have additional notes. These additional notes are most often found at the beginning of a Psalm, partly in the middle of a Psalm and sometimes at the end of a Psalm. These additional notes are most probably the work of the compilers of the Psalms. These additional notes served various purposes:

##### One. Some additional notes describe the character of a Psalm.

57 Psalms have the title a "mizmor", which means "a psalm or song of praise" accompanied by stringed instruments (Ps 24). 27 Psalms have the title a "shir", which means "a song or vocal music" (Ps 45). 15 Psalms have the title "shir ha-maaloth", which means "a song of ascents" and which were liturgical songs sung during the stages of pilgrimage to the annual feasts at Jerusalem (Ps 120). 5 Psalms have the title a "tephillah", which means "a prayer" (Ps 90). 13 Psalms have the title a "maskil", which were probably didactic or contemplative poems (Ps 32). 6 Psalms have the title a "miktam" (Ps 16), and 5 Psalms have the title a "shiggaion" (Ps 7), but these titles are no longer understood today.

##### Two. Some additional notes describe the presentation of a Psalm.

For example, Psalm 4 says that the Psalm is to be sung accompanied with stringed instruments. Psalm 5 says that it is to be accompanied by flutes. Psalm 22 says that it must be sung to the tune of "The doe of the morning". And Psalm 45 says that it must be sung to the tune of "Lilies". 55 Psalms have the title "for the director of music" (Ps 4), but we do not know what his responsibility was. 71 times the word "Selah" is found in the book of Psalms. Like so many other terms in the book of Psalms, we do not know anymore what it originally meant. It could have been some literary or musical term. We should not speculate about the meaning of these terms.

##### Three. Some additional notes describe the religious occasion at which a Psalm was sung.

For example, Psalm 45 was "a wedding song" and Psalm 92 was "a song for the Sabbath day".

##### Four. Some additional notes describe the author of the Psalm and sometimes add the historical occasion which led to the writing of the song (Isa 38:9).

For example, Psalm 18 is a Psalm of David, which he sang to the Lord when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. Psalm 51 is a Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba. And Psalm 90 is a prayer of Moses.

### **POINT 3. THE ORIGIN OF THE BOOK OF PSALMS**

#### **First. The name of the book.**

Not a single title can describe all the poetry found in the book of the Psalms. It contains teaching, prayers and songs. In the Hebrew Bible the name is "Book of praise songs". 2 Chronicles 5:12-13 relates that songs of praise and thanks were sung by singers accompanied by musicians playing cymbals, harps and lyres and the sounding of trumpets. The title of Psalm 145 has this name. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament the name is "Psalms". Psalms are songs sung accompanied by stringed instruments. 57 Psalms has this title (Ps 3). This is the name the New Testament uses for the book of Psalms in Luke 20:42 and Acts 1:20. However, the oldest name was probably "Prayers" as the subscription of Psalm 72 proves. Book I and II of the Psalms closes with the subscription, "This concludes the prayers of David son of Jesse."

#### **Second. The writers and dates of the individual Psalms.**

Many of the writers of the individual Psalms are mentioned by name. According to 1 Chronicles 16:7, we know that certain anonymous Psalms like Psalm 96, 105 and 106 were most probably composed or arranged by David. And according to Acts 4:25, the general practice in the early Christian days was to ascribe the anonymous Psalms to David. Psalm 2 is anonymous, but is ascribed to David in Acts 4:25. We know when people like Moses, David and Solomon lived. Korah, Asaph and Ethan were temple musicians and lived in the time of David, that is about 1000 B.C. (1 Chron 6:31-47; 16:7).

### **Third. The gathering of Psalms into volumes.**

How was the book of the Psalms compiled? Because the book of the Psalms contain Psalms written as early as Moses (Ps 90) and probably as late as the Babylonian exile (Ps 137), the book must have been gradually compiled into a book of 150 Psalms. Earlier smaller volumes of collections of the Psalms existed, which were assimilated into our present book of the Psalms. We can distinguish three different periods of compilation:

#### **One. During the first period, five smaller volumes of Psalms were compiled:**

The first four volumes all ended with similar doxologies.

*The first volume* consisted of the Psalms of David (3-41) and ended with the doxology of Psalm 41:13. Psalm 10 originally formed one Psalm with Psalm 9. Psalm 33 is ascribed to David in the Greek translation.

*The second volume* probably consisted only of Psalms of David (51-71) and ended with the doxology of Psalm 72:18-19. Psalm 72 was by Solomon and Ps 72:20 was written by the compiler of this volume of the Psalms.

*The third volume* probably consisted only of Psalms of the sons of Korah (42,44-49, 84,85, 87,88), the Psalms of Asaph (50,73-83), one Psalm of Ethan (89) and ended with the doxology of Psalm 89:52. In many Hebrew manuscripts Ps 42 and 43 constitute one Psalm.

*The fourth volume* consisted mainly of “the songs of ascents”, which were probably sung during the pilgrimages to Jerusalem (120-134) and ended with the doxology of Psalm 106:48.

*The fifth volume* consisted of Psalms beginning or ending with the word “Hallelujah”, which means “Praise the Lord!” Because the word “Hallelujah” does not form a part of the actual contents of the songs, it points to the existence of a “Hallelujah volume of songs” (104-106,111-113,115-117,135,146-150). The Greek translation proves that there existed uncertainty during the translation whether a particular “Hallelujah” belonged to the previous or the next Psalm. For example, the Hallelujahs at the end of Ps 106, 117 and 135 in the Hebrew text are put at the beginning of Ps 107,118 and 136 in the Greek text.

#### **Two. During the second period, three bigger volumes of Psalms were compiled:**

*The first volume* consisted of the first volume of the first period, that is, the Psalms of David to which the anonymous Psalms 1 and 2 were added (Ps 1-41).

*The second volume.* The second and third volumes of the first period seem to have existed as one volume for some time, to which Psalm 72 of Solomon, and Psalm 86 of David were added (Ps 42-89). This volume was distinguished by the fact that Psalms 53, 57, 60 and 70 were also found in one of the other volumes and that instead of the name “Lord”, it generally used the name “God” in its Psalms.

*The third volume.* The fourth and fifth volumes of the first period also seem to have existed as one volume for some time. This is evident from the fact that Psalms 105-107 begin with the same words, “Praise the Lord. Give thanks to the Lord.” To this volume other Psalms of David (101,103,108-110,138-145), one of Moses (90) and certain anonymous Psalms were added (91,100,102,114,119,137). This volume distinguished itself by the fact that like the first volume of this period, it also used the name “Lord” instead of “God” in the Psalms, but unlike the first volume of this period, it lacked the musical superscriptions.

#### **Three. During the third period, one large volume of Psalms was compiled.**

This is our present volume of 150 Psalms.

**Fourth. The compiler and date of compilation of the book of Psalms.** Our present book of the Psalms is a compilation of other smaller volumes of Psalms. We have no evidence when these separate volumes of Psalms were compiled. It is possible that this happened during the religious reform of king Hezekiah from 727-685 B.C., or during the religious reform of king Josiah from 639-608 B.C., or even after the return from exile in 537 B.C. during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah from 458-432 B.C. Psalm 126 and 137 were written during and after the exile, between 586-537 B.C. Because 1 Chronicles 16:8-36 is most probably a compilation of several Psalms of our present book of Psalms, we conclude that our present book of Psalms was compiled earlier than the books of Chronicles, that is, earlier than 350 B.C. The doxology of Psalm 106:47-48, which was written by the compiler of the fourth book of Psalms, was taken over by the writer of Chronicles in 1 Chronicles 16:35-36. 2 Timothy 3:16 teaches us that the writers of the individual Psalms as well as the compilers of the various volumes of the Psalms were inspired by the Holy Spirit. They stood in the service of the divine Author, the Holy Spirit, and wrote and compiled exactly those things which God wanted the people of the world to know.

## **POINT 4. THE DIVISION OF THE BOOK OF PSALMS**

**First. The theme** of the book of Psalms is “Prayers”.

### **Second. The book of Psalms is divided into 5 volumes:**

**One. The first volume** consists of Psalms 1-41. Psalms of David.

**Two. The second volume** consists of Psalms 42-72. Psalms of David, Korah and Asaph.

**Three. The third volume** consists of Psalms 73-89. More Psalms of David, Korah and Asaph.

**Four. The fourth volume** consists of Psalms 90-106. More Psalms of David and other anonymous poets.

Five. The fifth volume consists of Psalms 107-150. More Psalms of David and other anonymous poets.

An ancient Jewish statement said, "Moses gave the Israelites the 5 books of the law, and corresponding to these, David gave them the 5 volumes of the Psalms."

The first volume is said to correspond to Genesis and has as subject "man". For example, man's blessedness in Psalm 1, his fall in Psalm 2-14 and his restoration in Psalm 15-41.

The second volume is said to correspond to Exodus and has as subject "Israel". For example, Israel's ruin in Psalm 42-49, her Redeemer in Psalm 50-60 and her redemption in Psalm 61-72.

The third volume is said to correspond to Leviticus and has as subject "the sanctuary and its worship service".

The fourth volume is said to correspond to Numbers and has as subject "the earth". For example, the blessings needed in Psalm 90-94, the blessings anticipated in Psalm 95-100 and the blessings enjoyed in Psalm 101-106.

The fifth volume is said to correspond to Deuteronomy and has as subject "the word of God". For example, Psalm 119, Psalm 139:17-18, Psalm 143:5-10 and Psalm 147:15-20.

#### **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. During the next week, read Psalms 76-150. Next week we will introduce the book of Psalms - part 2.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom" and Internet on [www.dota.net](http://www.dota.net)

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".