

The Soundtrack of the Psalms (pt 1): Lament, Lordship, and a Life-Time of Longing

Psalms 1–41 | 07.09.2017 | Psalms

**I waited patiently for the Lord / He inclined and heard my cry
He brought me up out of the pit / Out of the miry clay**

**I will sing, sing a new song / I will sing, sing a new song
How long to sing this song? / How long to sing this song?**

Those are words from Psalm 40. Written by King David some 3,000 years ago.

AND . . . They are also the words of Bono, lead singer for U2.
. . . from a song entitled '40' . . . which comes from Psalm 40.

And They are the words of 1000s of people singing along with U2 at a concert in Germany
If you listen to the song on their live album. . . you'll hear the crowd singing

Singing words . . . which David wrote to praise God for his salvation.
Singing words . . . greater than they knew they were singing.

This is how the Psalms work . . .

They give expression to the deepest of emotions of humanity.

Even for unbelievers . . . their beauty and poetry touches the soul.

Yet . . . the Psalms are not meant to be sung without understanding.

As Paul said in 1 Cor 14:15: **I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind.**

This must be our aim too as we read the Psalms.

We don't want to read them, sing them, or pray them without understanding.

Rather, we seek their message by paying careful attention to his words.

Indeed, because God is a singing God – as **Zephaniah 3:17** says – then he knows something about notes, melodies, and orchestration.

And it should not surprise us that in the Psalms . . . we find an epic soundtrack of salvation.

Indeed, the Psalms are not a compilation of 150 bubble pop medleys.
They are an epic soundtrack.

Don't think Toby Mac, Third Day, or Hillsong.
Think massive musical movements.

Think John Williams.
Think Beethoven, Bach, Handel.

Getting the Feeling (Right)

When we look at the Psalms in this way . . . two things happen.

FIRST . . . We leave behind the world of 4 minute Christian songs . . . AND
SECOND . . . We enter a world of stunning poetry and sublime theology and symphony that took 100's of years to compose.

We must remember . . . the Psalms are not modern in any sense . . .

They speak from the perspective of the individual, but they do not glorify the individual.
They elevate God to the highest degree . . . but never in an academic way.
They teach us how to feel . . . without making us slaves to our feelings.

And in the first book . . . Psalms 1–41 we find THREE THEMES that enables us to get the feeling.

In other words, before getting the structure of Book 1 . . . we need to feel what David felt.

FIRST . . . if you read through Book 1 . . . you will feel the threat of **enemies** all around.

Psalm 3:1 introduces this threat . . . likewise, Psalm 7:6 says . . . READ
ATST Psalm 18 tells of how God defeats David's enemies. READ vv. 1–3
Psalm 23 speaks of the way God sets a table in midst of enemies
Psalm 27 teaches us how to trust God when enemy armies surround.
So . . . enemy hostility is the first theme in Book 1.

The **SECOND** note to feel is the repeated . . . cry for **salvation**.

Look at **Psalm 3:7 and 6:4** . . . READ
These petitions for salvation are mixed with confidence in God READ 3:8 and 7:10
Later . . . Psalm 34 echoes this hope of salvation READ vv. 6, 18

Throughout . . . God proves himself to be David's Savior.
Which leads us to the **THIRD** thing to feel – God as our refuge.

Refuge-seeking begins in 2:12 . . . where we see the invitation to seek God as a refuge.
In that opening verse . . . refuge is needed to protect the sinner from God's wrath . . .

Thereafter, refuge is needed because of enemies . . . *and* God's judgment.

So . . . the FEEL of Book 1 . . .

Swirls around enemy hostility and the need to seek refuge and salvation in God.

If you read thru Pss 1–41 . . . you can't help but feel David's plight *and* his confidence in the Lord.

So . . . if you are feeling vulnerable, threatened, or insecure . . . this Book is for you!

Getting the Structure

Next . . . after getting the feel of Book 1 . . . we need to see it's structure

THREE THINGS

FIRST Psalms 1–2 are the introduction for Book 1.

They not only introduce the whole Psalter . . . but also this first book.

So . . . we will see in Book 1 attention given to the Torah of God – as Psalm 1 emphasizes.

And . . . we will see attention given to God's kingdom.

In fact . . . in places like Psalm 18 and 19, we will begin to see how the Word of God and the Kingdom of God are related . . . and in Book 1 we will see how they relate to King David.

Which is the the SECOND feature of Book 1 . . .

Not only is it a book that combines instruction with kingdom, it is a book all about David.

Every Psalm, except Pss 10 and 33, has a superscription that reads 'of David.'

And even those two psalms are clearly related to David and his kingdom.

Thus . . . kingship is key theme in this book . . . and one that will rise and fall and rise again.

And I say rise and fall . . . because the royal themes of David are not a static reality in Book 1.

Rather . . . there are clearly sub-groups in this book which give shape to the Book.

In fact, I would characterize Book 1 as having three hills, or three pyramids, and 1 valley.

Or to put it in the only musical terms I know. . .

There is a certain strumming pattern in these books.

Here's what I mean . . .

When I learned to play guitar in college . . . the thing I struggled with was the 'strumming pattern' . . .

As a musical novice, I couldn't figure out how to make chords and strum at the same time.

Finally, however, after working on the down-down, up-up, down-up . . . it came together.

Let me suggest . . . in Book 1, we find a certain kind of strumming pattern.

Goes like this → **Up-Down, Up-Down, Up-Down, Down-Up**

Or to drop the metaphor . . . there are four groups of psalms in Book 1 and they are organized around center psalms which either go up in glory . . . or down in despair.

In this way . . . they form a certain kind of musical pattern or poetic terrain.

You won't see in other genres . . . but it's something you should expect in poetry.

The first hill begins with Ps 3 and ends with Ps 14, and takes Ps 8 as the summit.

The second hill begins with Ps 15, ends with Ps 24 and takes Ps 19 as the summit

The third hill begins with Ps 25, ends at Ps 34, and has Ps 29 as its summit.

The fourth section . . . the final valley . . . begins in Psalm 35 descends to Psalm 38 . . . and then ascends to Psalm 41 –the last Psalm in Bk 1.

Now . . .

If you're getting nervous about all this attention to all these literary highs and lows . . .

. . . let me preview the way in which these structures give hope to broken-hearted.

What if I told you . . .

God wrote the Psalms to be a spiritual metronome to calibrate your heart?

Rather than seeking to explain why you have highs and lows . . . they give you language and lyrics to regulate your heart – something like a spiritual pacemaker.

Indeed . . .

When your heart is beating out of rhythm (or not beating at all) . . . these mountains and valleys are the very thing . . . he has given you to comfort your soul?

Just as David suffered long before finding comfort in the Lord . . . so all children of faith are expected to follow a similar pattern.

Thus . . . God gives you these Psalms.

Jesus had to learn their rhythm . . . and all those who want to be like Jesus . . . who want to be with Jesus must learn them as well.

In this way . . . the Psalms give us the music we need to regulate and refresh our souls.

So . . .

This exercise of finding the arrangement of Book 1 is not academic.

It is a matter of life and breath, spiritual rest and soul renewal.

And thus it is worth our time to learn the structures of the Psalms – 3 hills and 1 valley.

FIRST, Psalms 3 – 14 form the first pyramid with Psalm 8 in the middle.

How do we know?

FIRST, Psalm 8 is one of three creation hymns in Book 1.

The other 2 are Ps 19 and Ps 29. And significantly, these are the other 2 summit psalms in Book 1.

Pss 8, 19, 29 all speak of creation's glory . . . and all are in the center of their respective groups.

LISTEN to what it says: READ Psalm 8:3–5

So this Psalm stands out amidst the laments psalms that surround it.

SECOND, when it observed that Pss 9/10 form 1 psalm, Psalm 8 is surrounded by 5 psalms on both sides.

Now how do we know that Psalms 9-10 are connected?

Because, together 9 +10 make up one acrostic poem. Psalm 9 is incomplete without Psalm 10.

THIRD, there are linguistic evidences of arrangement.

Psalm 8:1 and 8:9 both read – “O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.”

Whenever you read a refrain like this in Pss, you should ask: **What's going on?**

And what we find are two sloping sides that come down from the highpoint of man's glorious crown in **Psalm 8:5**.

We can observe this further because the last verse of Psalm 7 matches the first two verses of 9.

READ 7:17 . . . 9:1–2

After this . . . we find in Psalm 7:6 and Psalm 9:19 and 10:12 the command for God to **Rise Up**. And there may even be a connection between **holy hill in 3:4** and **Zion mentioned in 14:7**.

So I submit . . . there are significant textual evidences arranging these Psalms.

But also there's a mini-story of redemption . . .

In Psalms 3–7, David cries out for refuge; and in Psalm 9–14 that refuge is given – at least in part.

Psalm 8 is the turning point . . . for listen to the words of **Psalm 9:1–6** READ

After this . . . enemies remain in Psalms 10–14 . . . but God is also working to defend and deliver the one crying out to him.

So . . . that's how the first hill is arranged . . . let's look at one in Psalms 15–24.

And this time, we will work from the outside psalms-in.

Look at **Psalm 15**. It begins: **O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent?
Who shall dwell on your holy hill?**

Then the next 4 verses explain the qualifications of the person who may dwell in God's presence.

Ps 24:3–6 reads the same: **Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?
And who shall stand in his holy place?**

The next 3 verses speak of the necessary qualification for dwelling in the Lord's presence.

So Psalm 15 and 24 function as cornerstones for this group. **And in the middle is Psalm 19.**

. . . A psalm that extols the glory of God in creation and goodness of his Law.

. . . Listen to what **Psalm 19:7–11** says **READ**

. . . **This attention to the Law is what permits the king to Rule.**

. . . And thus like what we found in Psalm 1–2 . . . Psalm 19 leads into five royal psalms.

In fact . . . Psalm 19 is surrounded by Royal Psalms

Look at Psalm 18 . . . **READ Superscription**

This Psalm goes on to praise God for the Exodus-like salvation of David over his enemies.

Then after David is crowned . . . Ps 19 gives the king God's Word . . .

This Word enables him to rule and centers this groups of Psalms around the deposit of the Word – just like Moses received the Law of God on Mt Sinai

In fact . . . when we look at the arrangement, here's what we find:

Psalm 15 and 24 . . . both look to the hill of the Lord.

Psalm 16 and 23 . . . are both Psalms of Trust

Psalm 17 and 22 . . . both contend with enemies, and pray for deliverance.

Psalm 18 and 20-21 . . . both focus on the royal desires of the king.

So . . . there is arrangement evident in these Psalms . . . and when we read them in order . . .

Here's what we find:

In Ps 15–18 . . . God hears his anointed one, delivers him from his enemies, and sets him on high

Next in Ps 19 . . . we find praise for the Word of God,

Then, by delighting in God's Word, David qualifies to be king, something found in Psalms 20–21

Psalm 22 describes the ongoing threat of the nations, but also the deliverance of God.

Psalm 23 speaks of how the king is led by God his Shepherd, anointing him as king after he has traversed the valley of the shadow of death.

Psalm 24 . . . ends this section with the king of glory coming to the city. If this section follows the life of David . . . this I believe is the place where David receives his kingship.

That's the second hill focusing on the law and the kingdom . . . and now we come to the third . . . Ps 25–34.

The corner pieces of this mountain are Psalms 25 and 34, two Psalms mirroring one another.

First, they stand out as 2 **wisdom psalms** . . . Psalms that highlight the contrast btw right./unright
Second, they are both **acrostic psalms** . . . SO . . . by their forms they stand out.

Then when Ps 32–33 are read together . . . we discover Psalm 29 – hymn of praise – is central.
Significantly, Ps 29 stands out because of its emphasis on creation and glory . . . **READ**

Psalm 29 . . . extols the power of God . . . and makes his glory present.
And it's this presence we need to take notice of . . .

Remember, all of Book 1 has been crying out for God to save his people.

And in Psalm 8 . . . we heard him crown mankind with glory and dominion.

In Psalm 19 . . . we see the role the *torah* plays in qualifying the king.

But now, . . . it is God coming into his temple.

To be certain . . . Psalm 29 speaks of glory of creation LIKE a temple.
But look at what comes next in Psalm 30 . . . **READ**

The setting of Psalm 30 is the mountain of God – v.1, 3, 7

The situation is someone praising God for salvation – vv. 1–3

Even the Superscription . . . makes it plain . . . this is a temple hymn.

Even tho . . . David never built the temple . . . he was always deeply interested in securing
Yahweh's dwelling place in Israel.

In fact, . . . in Book 2, we will see how interconnected David and Solomon are with the
priestly ministries of the temple.

For now . . . consider how this temple focus solves the problem presented in the first Psalm.

In Psalm 25 we find that sin is an ongoing problem – **vv. 7, 11, 18**

While enemies are the main threat in Book 1, sin is the greater concern.
This is what separates man from God . . . thus David cries for pardon.

This petition will lead him to the house of God – the place where atonement for sin is made.

In fact, it is not until **Ps 32**—after coming to the house of the Lord— where forgiveness is found.
And listen to what **vv. 1–5** say . . . **READ**

So . . . *the third mountain tells us a story of forgiveness.*

The first mountain . . . centers on the power of God to defeat the enemies of David.

The second mountain . . . centers on the Torah, which will keep David in covenant with God.

The third mountain . . . centers on the temple itself and place of forgiveness.

Now . . . we come to the fourth group of Psalms . . . **Psalms 35–41**

And Instead of finding a hill, we find a valley.

Instead of ascending to the heavens where God dwells, we descend to the pit.

If you haven't caught it so far . . . Book 1 is filled with peaks and valleys.

One of the reasons why I feel comfortable saying there are three mountains and a valley in Book 1 is because of the way in which mountain and valley imagery is used.

Thus . . . after coming to three summits in Psalms 8, 19, 29, . . . now we find the all-too-familiar-experience of the man of God who continues to sin.

What do I mean?

Well . . . it would be a wonderful thought . . . if the temple expunged sin once and for all.

But under the old covenant. . . this was not possible . . . a greater sacrifice was needed.

Even today, we await the eradication of sin.

Indwelling sin is the experience of every Christian. And one we must learn to address.

When you come to saving faith in God . . . your sins are washed away.

But like David . . . you also need ongoing purification and sanctification.

This, I think, is what we find in Psalms 35–41.

In Psalm 34:22 . . . David rejoices . . . **"The LORD redeems . . .**

But in Psalm 35, the enemies of David return. And for the next three Psalms, spiritual warfare rages.

Finally, in Psalm 38 . . . sin re-enters the scene. **READ 38:1–4**

Friends . . . I can't tell you how nauseated I feel when I hear a friend has fallen into unrepentant sin.

It's a horrible feeling to see someone choose to walk the path of sin.

But there is something worse . . . and it is looking into our own souls and seeing curvature of the heart towards idolatry and sin. **This is called indwelling sin.**

And it is what, I believe, Psalm 35–38 is addressing . . .

These psalms testify to the way enemy opposition . . . can result in spiritual compromise.

If you read Ps 38 . . . you find the Psalm of a sinner. But it's the Psalm of a believing sinner

Verses 3–4 admits the presence of sin. **Verses 1–14** express the pain of sin.

But look at **vv. 15–16** . . . these are not the words of a unrepentant sinner. They are the words of a wounded sinner—someone who has known the joys of forgiveness and grieves over his sin. **READ**

Psalm 38 is such a vital word to sinning Christians . . . not a word to sinners outside of Christ.

Psalm 38 speaks to sinners in relationship with God . . . who have fallen into the mire. They are the words of David . . . a man who knew sin and forgiveness.

And thus . . . they give us the key to getting out of sin – Look at v. 18.

Confession – the honest admission of wrongdoing before God and others – . . . is the key to escaping sin . . . and it leads David to cry for help – **vv. 21-22** **READ**

And this brings us to the last three pss in Book 1 . . . and the words of Psalm 40.

**I waited patiently for the Lord / He inclined and heard my cry
He brought me up out of the pit / Out of the miry clay
I will sing, sing a new song / I will sing, sing a new song**

Do you see why David, and Bono, and the stadium in Germany loved to sing Psalm 40.

They rejoice in the song that comes on the other side of redemption.

In fact, as you read into Psalm 40–41 . . . God's Word promises victory over sin because someone outside themselves comes down to lift them out of the pit.

This is the message of the gospel . . . that salvation comes from the Lord.

And there is no joy like this joy . . . to know your sin and its FORGIVENESS.

This is why the book ends like it does – with a word of trust and praise . . . **42:10–12**

We've flown over these 41 verses . . . and my greatest hope is that

1. You will see that there IS order and arrangement in the Psalms.

AND . . . that is worth your while to see and savor the order of the Psalms.

So that . . .

2. Your heart might rise and fall with the highs and lows of God's Soundtrack of Salvation.

Friends . . . this is how the Psalms work . . .

In your life . . . God is going to bring hard circumstances to soften you,
In your pride and strength . . . he will graciously weaken you so that you will be moldable.

After all . . . you are made of clay . . . to reflect Christ's glory.

But for all of us . . .

We . . . Form + fashion ourselves after other idols + ideas . . . and the result are hearts that beat out of sync from God's goodness and glory.

The Psalms are given to us to shock our hearts into rhythm . . .

to us to teach us how to think and feel, shout and sing, ponder and pray.

In moments of calm /: . . . you do well to let the shape of the psalms form your heart.

So that . . .

When enemies attack . . . you will take refuge in the Lord.

When sin deceives . . . you will seek atonement in Christ – the new temple of God.

When buried in the pit . . . you will know how to cry out to God.

IOW By learning the Psalms . . . God is training your heart for the highs and lows ahead.

ATST In moments of crisis . . . the shape of these psalms have the power to bind up your broken bones

One thing you will see often in Book 1 is the mention of broken bones. Why?

I think, it's B/C . . . in this life you will be broken. The only question is . . . how will you get fixed?

If you fix yourself, your heart will go off rhythm . . . and it may kill you.

But if you give yourself to God and his Word . . . esp. to his Psalms

. . . he will comfort, strengthen, and heal you.

This is why we need the Psalms. And why the Psalms have been given to you.

So that you in your moment of need you can sing . . . **I waited patiently . . .**