

The Poetry of Life Psalms of Praise

The ancient Hebrews' name for the book of Psalms was, *Tehillim*, or praises. This points to the early purpose and perception of this collection of poetry and songs. Each of the five 'books' of the Psalms ends with a doxology of praise, and the entire collection ends with a crescendo of praise building in the last six psalms (145-150). The final line of the Psalms reveals the desire of the Psalter to have everyone and everything give praise to his awesome God when he declares, "*Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!*" Praise is the goal to which the entire collection is moving.

C. S. Lewis, writing about the gushing manner of praise contained in many of the psalms, says, ". . . just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it: 'Isn't she lovely? Wasn't it glorious? Don't you think that magnificent?'" The Psalmists in telling everyone to praise God are doing what all men do when they speak of what they care about."

Praise of God or the promise/anticipation of praise to God can be found in just about every Psalm, including the Psalms of Lament. However, the Psalms whose theme is dominantly praise oriented are:

-8, 19A, 29, 33, 47, 65, 66A, 93, 96-100, 104-106, 111, 113, 114, 117, 134-136, 145-150.

How is God being praised in the Psalms of Praise?

While there are many reasons that God is praised in the book of Psalms, there are a few themes that appear to be the most common. These are: Creation, God's awesome deeds (in general and in Israel's history), and God's reign over the earth.

1. Creation

- a. As one reads the Psalms of Praise it becomes quite obvious that the ancient Hebrew mind looked at the wonders of creation with awe and this flowed naturally into praise of God for creating such an amazing universe. Over and over again the wonders of creation are marveled at and God is praised for being behind it all. (19, 33, 96, 148, others)
- b. Keep in mind that some of the Psalms of Praise are written against a prevailing near-eastern belief that various gods created the world from chaos, not order. Thus when the psalmist speaks of God's plan, his wisdom, his purpose in creation, he is demonstrating how Yahweh is the God above all gods and worthy to be praised above all things.

2. God's Awesome Deeds

- a. While creation is lifted up continuously as one of God's mighty deeds, the acts of God in the history of Israel are praised throughout the psalms as well. Of particular note are God's saving work in the exodus from Egypt and subsequent conquest of the Holy Land. Many times people of all nations are encouraged to praise God for the wonderful things he has done for Israel, as if all people should be just as enthusiastic about what God has done for His people. This exuberant praise and excitement is common in the Psalms of Praise. (105:16-44, 114, 136)

3. God's Universal Reign Over All the Earth

- a. The authors of the Psalms are enamored with the fact that their God is over and above all things. This sovereignty is not just one of power, but of *salvation* for all peoples. Psalm 47:8-9 points to a God above all nations that draws all people to himself. (33:6-9, 65:5-8, 66, 117)