

HEARING THE WORD



NIGEL BARGE

Psalms (1)
Work Book

Hearing the Word Psalms (1) Work Book

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Nigel Barge, January 2014

Scripture Quotations taken from

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Resources

The New Bible Dictionary 3rd edition, published by Inter Varsity Press
The New Bible Commentary 21st century edition. A commentary on every Bible book, IVP

www.blueletterbible.org

Hearing the Word: A Tool for Bible reading



LOOK – What does it *say*?

- 1) The Text
 - a) What questions does it raise -
Who, What, When, Where, Why, How?
 - b) What surprises you?
- 2) The Context?
 - a) the surrounding text
 - b) the Book of the Bible
 - c) the whole Bible
 - d) the place in the Bible Story



LEARN – What does it *mean*?

- 1) What type of writing is it?
- 2) Answer the questions
- 3) Summarise the passage



LISTEN – What is the *message*?

- 1) Which is the main point?
- 2) Which is the key verse?



LIVE – How should we *respond*?

- 1) What does it show about God, (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) :
 - a) His nature and character?
 - b) His grace*
 - c) Jesus / his salvation**
- 2) What should I do?

* God's undeserved generosity is evident throughout the Bible, and it is perfectly expressed in Jesus.

** The Bible, from 'the fall' onwards, describes God's plan of salvation through his Son. Thus, *all* the Scriptures speak in some way of Jesus (Luke 24:27).

Reading 'POETRY' in the Bible

Whatever we read, we adjust to its style, sometimes without noticing. We don't approach a newspaper, a car manual, a cookery book, a poem, a scientific report and a Shakespeare play in the same way. We take into account the purpose for which it was written and the way in which the writer uses words. Since the Bible also has many styles – law, poetry, history, wisdom, prophecy, letters and visions – we need to allow for the style if we are to discern what God is saying.

The Psalms are 'Poetry'. To approach them correctly, keep in mind the following principles:

POETRY'S use of words

One of the great reformers held that 'Scripture cannot be understood *theologically* unless it be first understood *grammatically*' i.e. we need to take into account the devices the poet uses if we are to understand him.

a) *Parallelism*

The Psalmist often makes a point twice. He repeats it in different words, not to add anything, but simply to accentuate the point. We are meant to note the emphasis, but not to try to find new meaning in the repetition

e.g. "The heavens declare the glory of God

The skies proclaim the work of his hands." Ps 19:1

Sometimes the couplet shows a contrast instead:

e.g. "For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,

but the way of the wicked will perish." Ps 1:6

b) *Figures of speech*

A poet may use words in a way that is not literal but which reveals meaning in another way. So we often see

Metaphors e.g. 'God is a fortress' (Ps 46)

This does not imply a belief that God is made of stone. Rather, it expresses the Psalmist's confident sense of security that he has from God. When danger looms, he 'runs' to God and is safe.

Similes e.g. the mountains skipped like rams,
the hills like lambs (Ps 114:4)

The simile and the parallel statement do not suggest there was an earthquake; just that the physical world complied with God's will to release his people from Egypt.

Hyperbole (over exaggeration) is a device used to make a point. It must be taken into account when we are learning from the Psalms. Their teaching cannot be extracted line for line as in law but must be taken in context.

e.g. 'In sin did my mother conceive me' (Ps 51:5).

This does not imply that sex is sinful, or teach 'original sin'; rather, the poet expresses the weight of his sin: he has *always* been sinful!

POETRY and the Word of God

All Scripture is written by man and inspired by God; it is for making us wise for salvation and for building us up (2 Tim 3:16-17). This 'tension' is seldom more evident in the Bible than when we are reading its poetry. We need to take both aspects into account:

1) Written by man

a) The Psalms are Poetry

Poetry expresses emotion. It conveys how the writer felt at the time of writing. Rather than simply *stating* feelings the writer lets his words, and the pictures they convey, *express* his feelings. In seeking to understand any poem, it is therefore useful to ask about

(i) The timing

a) General: At what point in the history of Israel is it written?

b) Specific: What was the event/occasion that prompted it?

NB This may be specified in the title of the poem or it may be implied by the content as we 'read between the lines'.

(ii) The emotion What was the writer's underlying feeling?
Anger/pleasure; sadness/joy; confidence/anxiety; hope/despair?

(iii) The purpose: What is the writer's single target or goal?

b) The Psalms are songs

They express openly the emotion of the writer and encourage us to respond sympathetically and identify with him. i.e. What parts of this Psalm can I or should I say myself?

2) Inspired by God

The Psalmists, whether they knew it or not, were 'prophets carried along by the Holy Spirit.' (2 Peter 1:21) As well as expressing human emotion, they are also the means of God speaking to his people.

So, according to God's purpose in Salvation, we ask what God is saying to *us* through this Psalm.

How does it...

a) ...make us wise for Salvation?

How does God reveal himself in this Psalm?

How does he help us understand his plan of salvation in Jesus?

b) ...equip us?

What does God want me to do in response to this?

JESUS in the Psalms

All Scripture speaks of Jesus (Luke 24:27; John 5:39). Psalms do this

1) Directly

The book of Psalms is one of the most frequently quoted OT books in the NT. There are 70 quotations introduced by a formula like, 'David says concerning him...' There are 60 more quotations without a formula and a further 220 references.

Some Psalms which deal with the subject of the King can be seen as anticipating the Messiah. Psalm 2 is mentioned 17 times in the New Testament, where it is applied to Jesus in connection with his baptism, transfiguration, resurrection, final rule and judgment.

So there are *many* verses in the Psalms that speak directly and prophetically about Jesus.

2) Indirectly

The Scriptures describe the unfolding revelation of God in salvation history which culminates in his exact representation in Jesus (Heb1:1-3).

So the Psalmist writes within in his own historical situation but also anticipates and foreshadows Jesus who is to come. Therefore as we read the Psalms we ask ourselves:

What does this Psalm show us of the gift of God in Jesus?

The Book of the Psalms

The traditional titles of the Psalms suggest that David wrote half of them (73), Moses wrote one, Solomon two, sons of Asaph and Korah several.

They were used in private and public worship, and it is suggested that after the return from exile and the reconstruction of the Temple by Ezra in the 5th Century, they were formed into its official ‘Hymn book’.

The Psalms have been arranged into 5 ‘books’. There is no pattern in this organisation. The following types of Psalms are found intermingled in them:

1. Lament – an expression of distress and suffering to God
eg 3, 31, 39, 42, 57, 71, 120, 139, 142
2. Thanksgiving - an acknowledgement of gratitude to God
eg 65, 75, 124, 138
3. Praise – an appreciation of God
eg 8; 66, 103, 114, 145, 148, 150
4. Salvation History – a remembering of God’s past deliverance
eg 75, 105, 135
5. Celebration / affirmation – a ritual for acknowledging God’s rule.
eg 2, 18, 29, 47, 87, 89, 122
6. Wisdom – a consideration of Godly living
eg 36, 49, 112, 133
- 7 Songs of Trust - a profession of hope in God
eg 16, 62, 121, 125

Psalms covered in this Guide

Psalm 19	The heavens declare the glory of God	page 28
Psalm 22	My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?	page 32
Psalm 23	The Lord is my shepherd	page 8
Psalm 42	As the deer...so my soul pants for you, O God	page 24
Psalm 51	Have mercy on me, O God	page 12
Psalm 122	I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord	page 20
Psalm 150	Praise the LORD	page 16

I am the Lord's and He is mine

Background information

In the Middle East, shepherds lived with their sheep. They were nomadic and responsible for finding food for their flock. The sheep depended on the shepherd for *everything* – food, water, protection.

Where there was a sheepfold - a circular stone wall - the shepherd slept lying across the entrance, keeping the sheep in and wild animals out.

Today, a shepherd with a dog drives sheep from behind; back then, sheep had such confidence in their shepherd, they *followed* him.

Shepherds used a sling to drive off predators; and if a sheep was straying too far, he would land a stone *beyond* it, so it was startled into coming back. (If by mistake he *hit* it, it would run for miles!) David's skill with sling and stone (1 Sam 17:15, 49) came from long practice with a flock.

Word List

4	<i>rod</i>	shepherd's weapon to protect and rescue sheep
	<i>staff</i>	support to lean on, also to rescue sheep
5	<i>anoint...oil</i>	sign of hospitality
6	<i>cup overflows</i>	generous portion or share

Bible connections

1	<i>Jesus the good shepherd</i>	John 10:1, 14
3	<i>soul - love with all your soul</i>	Deuteronomy 6:5
	<i>- source of praise</i>	Psalms 103:1
	<i>paths of righteousness</i>	Genesis 15:6; Romans 3:22; 4:3ff
	<i>name's sake</i>	Ex 34:14; Deut 5:11; Ezekiel 36:22
4	<i>valley of shadow of death</i>	Isaiah 9:1-2; Matthew 4:16
	<i>rod and staff</i>	1 Samuel 17:34-36
	<i>comfort</i>	John 14:16
5	<i>table before enemies</i>	Leviticus 24:6
	<i>anointing head = joyful coronation -</i>	Psalms 45:7; 1 Samuel 16:13a
	<i>cup = lot/portion</i>	Psalms 16:5
	<i>overflows = abundant</i>	Malachi 3:10; John 10:10
6	<i>house of the Lord - love for</i>	Psalms 26:8
	<i>command to go there</i>	Deuteronomy 12:5

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1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

What surprises or confuses you?

2) The Context

a) Immediate

1) What are the circumstances that have prompted this poem from the title or from 'reading between the lines'?

2) Who was this poem written to/addressed for?

b) whole Bible

c) Bible story

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1) How do you answer the questions that the passage raises?

- 2) What emotion(s) are expressed in this poem? Which is the main one?
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LISTEN

- 1) What is the lesson or the main point?
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LIVE

- 1) What does it show about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?
 - a) His nature and character?
 - b) His grace
 - c) Jesus / His salvation

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

- 2) What should I do?

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

God is merciful

Background information

King David committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite and she became pregnant. Uriah was away on duty in the army and would have known he was not the father. To cover up, David gave instruction to his general that Uriah should be killed in battle in a way that made it look like an accident. After this was carried out, David took the now widowed Bathsheba as one of his wives. (2 Samuel 11)

God sent his prophet, Nathan, to confront him. He did this with a parable. When David condemned the villain of the parable, Nathan declared, 'You are the man'. He also said the son to be born would die (2 Samuel 12:7,14). David, deeply convicted of his sin, wrote Psalm 51.

Word List

7 *byssop* a herb with cleansing properties

Bible connections

- | | | |
|----|--|---------------------------------|
| 1. | <i>'Have mercy on me.'</i> | Mark 10:47 |
| | <i>God's compassion</i> | Exodus 34:6 |
| | <i>blot out</i> – c.f. word for 'cancel' in | Colossians 2:14 |
| 2 | <i>washed</i> - 1Cor 6:11 | Cleansed - 1 John 1:9 |
| 3 | <i>It is God the Holy Spirit who convicts people of sin.</i> - John 16:8 | |
| 4 | <i>sin against God</i> | Genesis 39:9 |
| 7 | <i>A sponge soaked in wine, on a stalk of byssop, was used to offer Jesus a drink at the crucifixion.</i> John 19:29 | |
| | <i>Christ's blood cleanses from sin.</i> | 1 John 1:7 |
| | <i>whiter than snow</i> | Isaiah 1:18 |
| 8 | <i>restoring joy</i> | Isaiah 61:3 |
| 9 | <i>blots out / remembers sin no more</i> | Isaiah 43:25 |
| 11 | <i>David receiving Spirit</i> | 1 Samuel 16:13 |
| 13 | <i>teaching transgressors</i> | Psalm 1; Matthew 28:20 |
| 14 | <i>without shedding of blood - no forgiveness</i> | Hebrews 9:22 |
| | <i>the righteousness of God, Jesus</i> | 1 Corinthians 1:30 |
| 15 | <i>declaring the wonders of God</i> | Acts 2:11 |
| 16 | <i>sacrifices not welcome to God</i> | 1 Sam 15:22; Matt 9:13; Heb 9:9 |

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God is worthy of all our praise

This Psalm is an exuberant song of praise to God

Word List

- 1 *Praise the LORD* Hebrew *Hallel-u* (praise-to) *Yah* (short form of 'Yahweh'). Jews thought this name for God, given to Moses at Exodus 3:14, was too holy to speak; so when reading the Hebrew text aloud, they said 'Adonai', meaning 'Lord'. Early translators, combining the consonants of YHWH and vowels of Adonai, came up with 'Jehovah', which is not a genuine Hebrew word. English Bibles normally use 'LORD' in small capitals when translating the Hebrew 'YHWH', and 'Lord' in lower case for 'Adonai'.
- sanctuary* the holy of holies in the Temple in Jerusalem
- 3 *trumpet* primarily an instrument for giving signals

Bible connections

- | | | |
|-----|---|--|
| 1 | <i>Praising God:</i>
<i>reason for</i>
<i>universally</i>
<i>in song</i>
<i>continually</i> | 1 Peter 2:9
Psalm 67:3
Psalm 9:11
Hebrews 13:15 |
| 2 | <i>God's power</i>
<i>God's greatness</i> | 1 Chronicles 29:12; Psalm 62:11; 65:6
Deuteronomy 3:24; Jeremiah 32:17-23 |
| 3-5 | <i>Praise God using:</i>
<i>music, percussion</i>
<i>harp</i>
<i>dancing</i> | 1 Chronicles 13:8
1 Chronicles 25:3; 2 Chronicles 5:12
Exodus 15:20; 2 Samuel 6:14 |
| 6 | <i>voice / breath</i>
<i>all-encompassing</i>
<i>in heaven</i> | Genesis 2:7
Psalm 148:7-12
Revelation 5:13 |

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God welcomes His people

Background information

1) The city of Jerusalem

Originally called Jebus it was the capital of one of the five kingdoms in Canaan. (Judges 19:10; Joshua 10:1ff) When David captured it, he made it his residence and brought the Ark to Jerusalem. (2 Samuel 5 & 6)

The Lord instructed David to build an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. (1 Chronicles 21:18). This then became the site of the Temple, built by Solomon. (1 Chronicles 22:1)

Thus the kingly rule and the worship of God were united on Mount Zion in the city of Jerusalem.

2) The origin of Psalm 122

David is living in Jerusalem, the altar has been built and he anticipates the building of the Temple. He writes the Psalm, rejoicing in God's provision and encouraging the faithful to worship there and recognises that the wellbeing of the nation depends on the prosperity of Jerusalem.

3) The use of Psalm 122

Psalms 120 -134 are known as the 'songs of ascents'. They are thought to be a group of songs used by the pilgrims as they made their way up to Jerusalem for the great festivals of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles.

They are known as the 'Great Hallel' and there appears to be a three-fold division among them marking the deliverance by God of the Jews from exile

- a) Ps 120 -123 The exile to Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar
- b) Ps 124 -128 The Homecoming which had been ordered by the Persian King Cyrus
- c) Ps 129 -134 The Restoration with Ezra and Nehemiah

As the pilgrims climbed up Mount Zion to Jerusalem, the physical ascent symbolised the story of the nation, from the lowest point in exile to the restoration, and the individual believer from the lowest state of distress to the highest degree of exaltation.

In this re-enactment, Psalm 122 may best be understood therefore from the perspective of one in exile. The believer is remembering, longing for and by faith anticipating the day when again the 'tribes will go up'.

Bible connections

- | | | |
|---|--|-------------------------------|
| 1 | <i>rejoice</i> | Philippians 4:4 |
| 2 | <i>Jerusalem, God's permanent earthly dwelling</i> | Psalms 132:13 |
| | <i>Shiloh had been temporary</i> | 1 Samuel 1:3 |
| | <i>Jerusalem as symbol of the church</i> | Revelation 3:12; 21:2,10ff) |
| | <i>standing firm</i> | Ephesians 6:11,13,14 |
| | <i>the church persevering</i> | Matthew 16:18 |
| 3 | <i>Jerusalem to be first city of world</i> | Isaiah 2:2 |
| 4 | <i>statutes to worship in Jerusalem</i> | Ex 23:14-17; Deut 16:16ff |
| 5 | <i>judgments</i> | Deuteronomy 17:8 |
| 8 | <i>brothers/ harmony amongst God's people</i> | Psalms 133:1; Ephesians 4:2ff |
| | <i>peace</i> | Philippians 4:7,9 |
| 9 | <i>House of God</i> | Psalms 23:6; 27:4; 84:10 |
| | <i>prosperity</i> | Psalms 1:3 |

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God is trustworthy

Background information

The heading of the Psalm describes it as a 'Maskil of the sons of Korah'. A Maskil was a term showing that it was used for instruction.

As to the Author, some, like Calvin, think that it was written by David in the latter part of his exile by Saul (1 Samuel 23-30) and committed to the sons of Korah. Others think it was written by the people of God, when in exile in Babylon (c.f. Psalm 137)

Word List

5	<i>Jordan</i>	River running north to south in Palestine
	<i>Hermon</i>	High mountain (2,814m) in Anti-Lebanon range. Headwaters of R Jordan start here.
	<i>Mt Mizar</i>	location unknown. Hebrew 'Mizar' means "small"

Bible connections

- 1 *Thirsting for God* - Psalm 63:1; John 7:37
2. *Living God* Psalm 84:2
Non-living gods - Exodus 20:4; Jeremiah 10:1-10
- 3 *Scoffers* Psalm 1:1; Acts 17:18; 2 Peter 3:3
- 4 *House of God* Attendance Deuteronomy 12:5
Refuge Isaiah 37:1
Blessings Psalm 84:4
Procession to Psalm 122
- 5t *the comfort of God* - Psalm 103:13; John 14:16
- 5/11 *Jesus is the Saviour* - Luke 2:11; Philippians 3:20
- 9 *forgotten* Psalm 22:1; Isaiah 49:14-16; Matthew 27:46
God the rock Matthew 7:24
enemy Ephesians 6:12; 1 Peter 5:8
- 11 *hope in God* Jeremiah 17:7; Colossians 1:27;
Hebrews 6:19; 10:23; 11:1; Titus 2:13.

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God is perfect – physically and morally

Background information

The Egyptians of the day thought the Sun was the supreme God and every Pharaoh was his incarnation on earth.

Word List

7	<i>Law</i>	term for the Torah (the first 5 books of the Bible)
	<i>soul</i>	one's whole being
	<i>Statutes</i>	(lit. 'meeting place') Instructions within covenant
8	<i>Precepts</i>	that which God has charged us to do
9	<i>Ordinances</i>	God's whole revealed way to live
14	<i>heart</i>	"mind" in Jewish thought

Bible connections

1	<i>God evident in creation</i>	Romans 1:20
	<i>Creator God</i>	John 1:1; Col 1:16; Job 38
4	<i>Universal scope of message</i>	Romans 10:18
7-10	<i>God's Word</i>	Psalm 119
7	<i>God's perfect Word</i>	Psalm 18:30
9	<i>the fear of the Lord</i>	Proverbs 9:10
12	<i>God knows our sin.</i>	Psalm 139:1
	<i>'Seeing' Jesus leads to sense of unworthiness.</i>	Luke 5:8; 7:7
	<i>Conviction leads to faith.</i>	John 16:8

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God is always worthy of our worship

Background information

David is most likely writing of his experience when King Saul was seeking to kill him and he was on the run (1 Samuel 23 -27).

It is a Psalm that the New Testament writers quote as being directly **Prophetic** about Jesus (see verses marked **(P)** in Bible connections below).

As well as this there are many connections from the Psalm which are not direct quotations.

Word List

12	<i>Bashan bulls</i>	choicest and heaviest breed of the day
16	<i>'dogs'</i>	Barbarians.
22ff	<i>declare....praise</i>	Sacrifice and feast following completion of a vow of service to God (Leviticus 7:16; Deuteronomy 12:17-19)
25	<i>great assembly</i>	Possibly one of the four main Jewish festivals
29	<i>rich ones</i>	literally, 'fat ones'

Bible connections

1	<i>Jesus' cry on the cross</i>	Mark 15:34 (P) ; Matt 27:46 (P) ; Gal 3:13
6-8	<i>scorned . . . despised</i>	Isaiah 53:3
9	<i>known to God</i>	Jeremiah 1:5; Ephesians 1:4,5
10	<i>our whole lives planned by God</i>	Psalm 139:13-16; Job 10:8-12
14	<i>Jesus life poured out</i>	Isaiah 53:12
18	<i>Jesus' garments divided by lot</i>	John 19:24 (P)
19ff	<i>God chose the time for Jesus' sacrifice.</i>	Matthew 26:56
22	<i>After saving us Jesus calls us brothers.</i>	Hebrews 2:12 (P)
23	<i>Tell what God has done for you.</i>	Mark 5:19
27	<i>All will bow down to Lord Jesus.</i>	Philippians 2:10
29	<i>Riches cannot get us to heaven.</i>	Mark 10:23-27
31	<i>Jesus has done it!</i>	John 19:30

LOOK

1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

What surprises or confuses you?

2) The Context

a) Immediate

1) What are the circumstances that have prompted this poem from the title or from 'reading between the lines'?

2) Who was this poem written to/addressed for?

b) whole Bible

c) Bible story

LEARN

1) How do you answer the questions that the passage raises?

- 2) What emotion(s) are expressed in this poem? Which is the main one?
- 3) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?
- 4) Give an overall 'picture' of the passage in a few sentences.

LISTEN

- 1) What is the lesson or the main point?
- 2) Which verse best sums up the passage's message?

LIVE

- 1) What does it show about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?
 - a) His nature and character?
 - b) His grace
 - c) Jesus / His salvation

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

- 2) What should I do?

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

Sharing the Word

Use

'Hearing the Word' can be used alone, with one other person, or in a group

Preparing for a group

Time put in alone beforehand will greatly benefit time spent together.

Work through the stages - LOOK, LEARN, LISTEN, LIVE.

Write down your own questions and answers *

A format

If you have 45 mins together, you might like to try dividing it up like this.

(If longer or in a large group, you can extend the times)

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| 1) Drink, bite to eat, chat | (10 mins) |
| 2) A Bible reading | (2 mins) |
| 3) A Bible study | |
| a. Any questions? (Whether answer is known or not!)
(Don't answer any, till all questions noted!) | (2 mins) |
| b. Any relevant cross references? | (2 mins) |
| c. Discussion of answers | (13 mins) |
| d. Conclusion | (10 mins) |
| i. A Key verse and Main Point? | |
| ii. What does it show about God / Jesus? | |
| iii. What should I do? | |
| 4) Sharing (Trials and joys – family, work, self) | (5 mins) |
| 5) Prayer | (1 min) |

Remember!

As we gather round God's Word

- a) Listen to the views of others
- b) Make room for the novice. They can join in too when you start by listing 'Any questions'
- c) Don't let the 'knowledgeable' dominate. Encourage everyone to think for themselves.
- d) Try to include others' especially, 'seekers' in your sharing together.

* The **process** is explained and practised in a four-hour course, suitable for all, called '**An Introduction to 'Hearing the Word'**'. Email: office@tpc.org

“I can read the Bible for myself!”

To show that the Bible is accessible to all,
the Rev Nigel Barge, minister of Torrance Parish Church,
has devised a tool called ‘Hearing the Word’.
The Manual explains the basic principles of Bible reading,
teaches them by means of an interactive course,
and practices them on a single passage, Mark 10:35-45,
Participants follow in a Workbook: *Hearing the Word - Introduction*,
which includes the next six passages in Mark,
so they may follow on for themselves.

As the principles apply equally to all, the course will both
instruct the novice and refresh the ‘hardened’ Bible student!