

HEARING THE WORD



NIGEL BARGE

Psalms (2)
Leader's Guide

Hearing the Word Psalms (2) Leader's Guide

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Published by Nigel Barge, Torrance

Email: info@hearingtheword.org.uk

Website: <https://hearingtheword.org.uk>

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Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to Phil and June Malloch, whose tireless editing, reviewing and pulling together of materials has enabled the 'Hearing the Word' resource to be shared with the wider church.

Nigel Barge, January 2014

Scripture Quotations taken from

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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

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DIFFERENT TYPES OF WRITING IN THE BIBLE

Whenever we read, we approach different forms of writing in different ways, sometimes without noticing. We would not expect to read Shakespeare, a newspaper report, a car manual, a rule book and a poem in the same way! In each we would take into account the purpose for which it was written and the way in which words were used.

We should do the same with the Bible. God's word was given in many different types of writing – Law, Poetry, History, Wisdom, Prophecy, Letters, 'Apocalyptic' (symbolic dreams and visions of end times), Story (narrative) etc

While acknowledging God's truth throughout, we need to take into account the medium in which his Word is given, to discern what he says and what we should do with it.

READING POETRY

Use of words

One of the great reformers held, that 'Scripture cannot be understood theologically unless it be first understood grammatically' ie 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 a different way, not to add anything, but simply to accentuate the point. The reader is meant to note the emphasis but not 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

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 is not expressing the belief that God is made of stone. Rather, it expresses the Psalmist's confidence in the security that he has in 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) does not suggest there was an earthquake; just that the physical world complied with God's will to release his people from Egypt.

Hyperbole (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.

eg 'In sin did my mother conceive me' (Ps 51:5)

This does not imply that sex is sinful, or teach 'original sin'; rather, it expresses the weight of sin the poet feels: 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 quotes introduced by a formula eg 'David says concerning him'. There are 60 quotes 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' baptism, transfiguration, resurrection, final rule and judgment.

So there are many verses that speak directly & 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 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?

SHARING THE WORD TOGETHER

There are great benefits in sharing together round God's Word: knowing we will meet with others *weekly* can help us to be disciplined; we learn from insights God gives to others; the fellowship enriches our lives.

Set aside time through the week (if possible, 10 minutes each day), read the passage carefully then work through the questions. *Write down* your answers and turn the passage over in your mind all week.

When you meet, for an hour or so each week, read the passage together. Work through the **Look, Learn, Listen, Live** pattern on page 3, sharing the thoughts you have written down during the week. Try to get all the questions out in the open first; don't jump to offer answers. If one reader has more knowledge than others, resist the temptation to dominate!

Leave plenty of time for the **Live** section at the end: the application is the point of the study!

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, 22, 31, 39, 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; 19, 66, 103, 114, 145, 148

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 45	page 5	Psalm 2	page 21
Psalm 115	page 9	Psalm 37	page 25
Psalm 95	page 13	Psalm 110	page 29
Psalm 83	page 17	Psalm 90	page 33

The Lord is eternally married to His church

Background information

This “Wedding Psalm” shares a great deal with Song of Solomon. The king is the bridegroom and the poet praises him before addressing the bride. The psalm concludes with the prospect of many ‘sons’.

Word List

<i>maskil</i>	probably a musical term
<i>Sons of Korah</i>	group of sacred musicians
6 <i>sceptre</i>	rod, often ornate, carried as symbol of personal sovereignty
7 <i>anointing</i>	pouring oil on body, to signify divine favour
8 <i>myrrh</i>	aromatic resinous gum
<i>aloes</i>	resin from a fragrant wood
<i>cassia</i>	aromatic bark
9 <i>Ophir</i>	country from which gold was imported to Judah, perhaps in Arabia or E. African coast
12 <i>Tyre</i>	principal seaport on Phoenician coast, wealthy place

Bible connections

2 <i>gracious words</i>	Luke 4:22
4 <i>ride forth</i>	Revelation 6:2
6 <i>throne and sceptre,</i>	Hebrews 1:8 (ascribed to Jesus)
6-7 <i>God loves righteousness and justice</i>	Psalm 11:5-7; 89:14
7 <i>anointed</i>	Psalm 2:2; Isaiah 45:1, 65:1
9 <i>royal bride</i>	Ephesians 5:22-33; Rev 19:7-8
13-14 <i>glorious garments</i>	Isaiah 61:10
16 <i>many sons</i>	Hebrews 2:10-13

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’?

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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?
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- 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.

The Lord is faithful and trustworthy

Background information

Psalms 113-118 are known as the ‘Egyptian Hallel’ Psalms because they celebrate the deliverance from Egypt. They were sung at the great festivals of Passover, Weeks (Pentecost) and Tabernacles. The ‘Hallel’ may come either at the beginning or the end of each Psalm.

113-114 were sung *before* the Passover meal and 115-118 *after* it. So Jesus and his disciples would have sung them in the Upper Room.

‘Hallelujah’ is a Hebrew word with three parts; *Hallel* (praise) -*u-* (to) *Yah* (Yahweh, never spoken; Jews always said ‘the Lord’ instead)

Psalm 115 probably dates not from the Exodus from Egypt, but much later, after the Exile. i.e. the Jewish exiles have returned from Babylon to Jerusalem and are under pressure, with their enemies taunting them. However, God is in control.

Word List

4	<i>idols</i>	man-made objects or statues worshipped as God
	<i>house of Israel,</i>	another name for Jacob = ‘he struggles with God’
	<i>house of Aaron</i>	the priestly clan
18	<i>Praise the Lord</i>	the Hebrew is Hallel-u-jah, see above.

Bible connections

1	<i>God’s faithfulness</i>	Exodus 34:6
2	<i>“Where is their God?”</i>	Psalm 42:3; 79:10; Joel 2:17; Micah 7:10
3-7	<i>God and idols</i>	Jeremiah 10:1-5
9-11	<i>Trust in the Lord</i>	Psalm 37:3; 62:8
12	<i>God remembers his people and will bless them.</i>	1 Chronicles 16:15; Genesis 12:2
16	<i>earth given to man</i>	Genesis 1:28

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Study 3

Psalm 95

The Lord alone is worthy of your worship

Background information

Worshippers on the way to the Temple may have sung this Psalm. It is first a call to joyful worship and secondly a solemn warning. The warning is expounded and applied in Hebrew 3:7 - 4:13.

Word List

1	<i>Rock</i>	term to describe God
7	<i>Today</i>	word is emphatic, critical character of present moment
8	<i>Meribah</i>	Hebrew means quarrelling
	<i>Massah</i>	Hebrew means testing
9	<i>fathers</i>	ancestors
10	<i>forty years</i>	the time the Israelites spent in wilderness because of their disobedience

Bible connections

1-2	<i>exuberant praise</i>	c.f. first Palm Sunday Luke 19:37-38
1	<i>Rock of our salvation</i>	2 Samuel 22:47
3	<i>God as King</i>	Psalm 47:2; John 1:49; 1 Timothy 6:15
4-5	<i>God as Creator</i>	c.f. Romans 8:39; Phil 2:10; Col 1:16
7	<i>God as Shepherd</i>	Psalm 23; John 10:1-16
8	<i>Meribah and Massah</i>	Exodus 17:1-7; Numbers 20:1-13
8-11	<i>solemn warning</i>	Hebrews 3:7 - 4:13
10	<i>forty years</i>	Exodus 16:35; Numbers 14:34

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The Most High rules over ALL the earth

Background information

Enemies named in v6-7 surround Kingdom of Israel. Assyria is a major power to the north-east of them. They want to destroy it. Asaph's reaction is to pray - to ask God to save them as He had done in the past. He recognises that it is God's battle.

Calvin links this Psalm with King Jehoshaphat (vs 6-7 =2 Chron 20:1,10,22; vs 12= 2Chron 20:11; Asaph = 2 Chron 20:14)

Nations mentioned **surround** Israel : eg Assyria in North; Ammon and Moab in East; Amalek, Edom and Midian in the South. Philistia and Tyre (sea power) in East. NB all are involved allied against Israel

Some nations are also relatives - descendants of Abraham

Edom –	Esau's descendants
Ishmaelites -	Descendants of Ishmael, Abraham's illegitimate son (Esau married one of his daughters)
Ammonites	Descendants of Lot's younger son by his daughter;
Amalek	Grandson of Esau,
Moab	Descendants of Moab (son of Lot's incestuous union with his daughter).

Word List

Asaph of levite family, serving musically in Temple 1Chr16:4-5

Sisera/Jabin canaanites commander – defeated (Judges 4:1,22)

Kishon River near Mt Carmel where Israel defeated Sisera

Endor Town 6km S of Mt Tabor

Oreb/Zeeb/Zebah/Zalmunna Midianite leaders routed by Gideon (Judges 7:25)

Bible connections

3	<i>effect of God's enemies</i>	Psalm 31:9-13
4	<i>attempt to destroy God's people</i>	Esther 3:6
9-12	<i>dealing with God's enemies</i>	Judges 4-8
	<i>Psalmist knew his Bible!</i>	See also Ps 42:6, 77:10-12
	<i>of Sadducees</i>	Matthew 22:29
18	<i>“You alone are the Most High.”</i>	Philippians 2:9-11

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The Lord is fearsome

Background information

The first singers of this Psalm were probably thinking of the period when David was making his conquests of the surrounding nations. Its allusions are Messianic and apply to our Lord

Word List

2	<i>Anointed One</i>	<i>Hebrew</i> Messiah, (the King)
6	<i>Zion</i>	another name for Jerusalem; David captured fortress of Zion and made it his city 2 Samuel 5:6-7
7	<i>decree</i>	the will or purpose of God i.e. an order with power
12	<i>kiss the Son</i>	submit to Him
	<i>Blessed</i>	when applied to man it denotes a state of happiness

Bible connections

1-3	<i>Used by believers in their prayer after Peter and John had been grilled by the Sanhedrin</i>	Acts 4:25-26
6	<i>King</i>	Psalm 10:16; 24:7-10
	<i>Zion</i>	2 Kings 19:31, Psalm 9:11; 48:2; 110:2
	<i>David installed in Zion</i>	2 Samuel 5:6
7	<i>'You are my Son'</i>	Matthew 3:17; Acts 13:32-33; Hebrews 1:5
8	<i>the king's enthronement</i>	Philippians 2:9; Revelation 2:26
9	<i>the king's rule</i>	Revelation 2:26-27; 12:5; 19:15
10	<i>God's wrath</i>	Deuteronomy 9:8, Revelation 6:15-17

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The Lord is worthy of our patient trust

Background information

This psalm of David is an acrostic poem, i.e. each stanza begins with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The NIV uses spacing to show the progression. (You can see all 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet at Psalm 119, where each group of 8 verses begins with the same letter.)

Psalm 37 uses paradoxes to show the blessing of trust in God.

Word List

1	<i>do not fret</i>	literally, do not get heated,
37	<i>future</i>	or posterity

Bible connections

2	<i>cf Hezekiah's prayer</i>	2 Kings 19:26
3-5	<i>God's trustworthiness</i>	Psalm 55:22
9	<i>reward for obedience</i>	Leviticus 26:1-13
10-22	<i>cf Revelation 17:16-17</i>	
11	<i>Meek will inherit the land</i>	Numbers 14:24, Matthew 5:5
16	<i>compare true wealth/poverty</i>	Proverbs 28:6
31	<i>God's law in our hearts</i>	Jeremiah 31:33

Also, there are many parallels with the book of Job

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God is in complete charge**Background information**

This Psalm is quoted in the New Testament more than any other. It is directly prophetic of the Messiah and him alone. Jesus himself uses it (Matthew 22:41-45, Mark 12:35-37, Luke 20:41-44)

Word List

2 <i>Zion</i>	another name for Jerusalem
4 <i>Melchizedek</i>	King of Salem (an early name for Jerusalem) and priest of 'God Most High'

Bible connections

1	<i>Jesus uses this verse in conversation with Pharisees: see refs above</i>
	<i>Peter quotes it in his Pentecost sermon</i> Acts 2:34
	<i>Quoted to show Jesus is greater than angels</i> Heb 1:13, see also 12:2
3	<i>troops will be willing...</i> cf Deborah's Song Judges 5:2; Rom 12:1
	<i>freshness of youth</i> cf Isaiah 40:28-31
4	<i>Melchizedek, who blessed Abraham</i> Genesis 14:18-20;
	<i>applied to Jesus</i> Hebrews 5:5-6,10; 6:19 - 7:28
5	<i>God's wrath</i> Psalm 2:5; Romans 2:5;
	<i>Revelation 6:16-17, 11:18</i>
7	<i>drink from brook...</i> ? allusion to Gideon and his 300 Judges 8:4

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The Lord is compassionate, always.

Background information

This Psalm is a prayer of Moses the man of God. There are many echoes of Moses' words in Deuteronomy, especially chapters 32-33.

It is suggested by some that it might have been written in the context of Numbers 21:4-7

The Psalm tells us that man's mortality and his sin are surrounded on every side by the unchanging grace of God. The thoughts about man's mortality are also seen in the book of Job.

Word List

<i>Moses</i>	The leader who was used by God to lead the Jews out of Egypt and across the desert, up to the Promised Land
9,11 <i>wrath</i>	God's righteous anger

Bible connections

1	<i>God is our security</i>	Ecclesiastes 1:27; Psalm 9:9; 84:1; 91:9
2	<i>everlasting God</i>	Isaiah 9:6, 57:15; Gen 21:33; Ps 102:24-27
3-5	<i>mortal man</i>	Genesis 3:19f; Job 34:14-15; 1 Cor 15:47; Isaiah 40:6-8; James 1:10-11
4	<i>God's timing</i>	Job 10:5; 2 Peter 3:8
7-12	<i>may be a reference to the years wandering in the wilderness</i>	
7	<i>no sin is hidden from God</i>	Hebrews 4:13; Ephesians 5:12-13
11	<i>God's fearful wrath</i>	Psalm 7:11; 76:7
13	<i>God's compassion</i>	Exodus 34:6; Deuteronomy 13:17, 32:36; Nehemiah 9:17-19; Psalm 51:1, 86:15, 103:8,13; Isaiah 54:7-10; Lamentations 3:22; Joel 2:3; Luke 13:34; Romans 9:15; 2 Cor 1:3

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 - 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!) (2 mins)	
(Don’t answer any, till all questions noted!)	
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!