

119): the kingship of the Messiah (Pss 2, 72, 110), and many other themes. It has been said that the rest of the Bible is God's word to the world and the Psalms are man's word to God. This is true, but God has in turn taken those words of men and given them back to us as his word, sanctified for our use.

Some questions you will want to consider in your study of the Psalms are these: Are the Psalm titles reliable? How can we know? How are Christians to understand the imprecations--the curses and prayers for judgment (as in, for example, Pss 35, 69, 109)? Should the church use only the psalms for singing, etc.

Regarding archaeology, the Psalms were once thought to have been written during the post-exilic era (about 450-350 BC) or even Maccabean times (167-143 BC). The discovery of a scroll of psalms at Qumran, however, changed this viewpoint dramatically. The manuscript contained the psalms in basically the same order and with the same titles as are found in our later manuscripts and printed editions of the Bible. This means that by the time of the Qumran community (about 100 BC to AD 70) the psalms had not only been written but the compilation of the Psalter was complete and authoritative. Critics today admit that most of the psalms are probably from the time of the monarchy in Israel.

The clay tablets from the site of Ras Shamra (Ugarit) show that religious poetry of this type would have been known from even before the time of the exodus of Israel from Egypt. It also seems that the Israelite authors used ideas similar to those found at Ugarit for apologetic purposes. Baal, for example, is called the "Rider of the Clouds" (Pss 68:4, 104:3). He is said to be enthroned in heaven (Pss 2:4; 103:19). Other parallels could be given but the message of the Bible is clear: other peoples may claim these attributes for their (false) gods, but they are true only of the Lord, the one true God.

Keys to understanding. Psalms 1 and 2 -nite to introduce the main themes of the Psalter. Psalm 1 teaches of the two ways open to all people and the consequences of each. It also uses the lesson of meditating upon Scripture to suggest doing just that with the rest of the book. Psalm 2 points to the heavenly rule of God and the coming reign of the Messiah. Psalm 150 closes the book with another dominant theme: the praise of God by all of his creation.

Study tips...two major factors should be kept in mind when studying the Psalter. First, it is a compilation of many individual works. This means that, unlike the historical books, there is no necessary connection between consecutive chapters (psalms). Each psalm must, therefore, be studied as an individual unit to discern its theme and development of that theme. It can then be related to other psalms with the same or similar theme. Second, Hebrew poetry is not like western poetry. Hebrew poetry depends upon the balance and interplay of ideas rather than the sounds of words as Western poetry traditionally does (e.g. rhyme and rhythm). For this balance Hebrew poetry uses parallelism...using two or more lines to express one main idea. There are four basic types of parallelism in the Hebrew Bible: 1) synonymous, as in Psalm 27:1, where both lines reiterate the same idea; 2) antithetical, as in Ps. 90:6 where the second line contrasts with the first; 3) synthetic, as in Ps 1:1-2; 2:3, where the second line builds upon or adds to the first, and 4) climactic, as in Psalm 55:16, where the secondline completes the first line (which is not a complete thought).