

Bible Study # 75
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The Writings Series—Introduction

This evening we want to get into a new series. I **want to give you an introduction to a series on the Writings.** The Writings is the third division of the Old Testament (the Hebrew Scriptures) as the Jews have traditionally divided them.

Jesus talked about it in the book of Luke. Notice in the very last chapter of the book of Luke.

Luke 24:44-45, “Then He said to them, ‘These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms [Writings] concerning Me.’ And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.” Jesus Christ defined the Scriptures as consisting of the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms, or the Law, the Prophets and the Writings.

This third division, the Writings, was sometimes termed “the Psalms” because Psalms was the first book of the section and it was the longest book of the section. From the time of Ezra and Nehemiah down until today, the Jews have always preserved what they have termed the “Tripartite Division of the Old Testament” (the Hebrew Scriptures). “Tripartite” simply means three sections of it—the Law, the Prophets and the Writings.

Now the **Law** is the most basic revelation of God. It introduces God as the Creator and reveals to us God’s instruction. The word “law” (“Torah” in the Hebrew) is broader and more inclusive than what we simply think of as “law” in English. When we say “law,” we tend to think of a list of rules that are written out: you shall do this; you shall not do that. That is the law, but that’s not all there is to law. Law can consist of more than that. Law can consist of illustrations and examples. Torah is instruction.

God sometimes instructs us by examples. You read the story of certain people—we have examples that we should not follow and we have examples that we should follow. Part of the way that God instructs us in His Word is the testimonies. They are a part of the law and so are the commandments and the statutes. The law is God’s most basic revelation.

The **Prophets**, in that sense, are commentary of the law. The Prophets are based on the blessings and the curses of the law. The law says you will be blessed if you obey and cursed if you disobey.

These are the blessings and curses found in Leviticus 26—in the law. The Prophets simply tell us what happens when you obey and what happens when you disobey.

The Law is the five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. They are the most basic revelation of God.

The Prophets were termed the Former and the Latter Prophets. The Former Prophets were books we would normally consider historical: Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. The Latter Prophets were the ones we normally think of as prophetic: the Major Prophets of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel and then the 12 Minor Prophets that we have just finished going through in the most recent set of Bible studies. The Major and Minor Prophets were called the Latter Prophets.

Actually, the distinction between history and prophecy is an arbitrary distinction. It simply depends on where you’re standing in the course of time.

Isaiah 57:15, God inhabits eternity. He doesn’t make the distinction between history and prophecy as we do.

Romans 4:17, He calls those things that do not exist as though they did.

Isaiah 46:10, He declares the end from the beginning. That’s a little different perspective than you and I have because we inhabit finite time (here and now). To us there is a very real distinction between history and prophecy. God does not make the same sort of distinction.

Much of what was written as prophecy that related to the first coming of Christ is not prophecy anymore; it is history. The prophecies of Christ’s first coming have been fulfilled, so in that sense, that’s history. Much of what we consider prophecy now, in a few years will be taught as history in Tomorrow’s World. The events that we are seeing shape up in Europe (that we are calling prophecy) is going to be in the history books in a few years. That will be a part of what we are teaching people as a part of history during the time period of the Millennium.

So, all of those books ultimately have a connection. They all tell the story of what happens when you obey and what happens when you disobey the law. In that sense, they form a commentary on the law. They focus in on consequences, good or bad.

The **Writings**, the final third division, are a little different. One thing that nearly all of the books of the Writings have in common is that they are poetic. There is a lot of poetry and poetic writing in this section. The book of Psalms dominates

the section. The Writings are sort of anchored on either end by lengthy books, Psalms and Chronicles.

You could divide the Writings into three sections. The **first** section would be books of poetry and wisdom: Psalms, Proverbs and Job. The **second** would be the five Festival Scrolls: Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther. Each is read at a festival season. Then the **third** section of the Writings is what would be termed the “post-exilic” books. In other words, the ones that were written after the exile—the ones that were written after Nebuchadnezzar had taken the Jews captive. Daniel, at the end of the Old Testament, sets the stage for Revelation, which concludes the New Testament and the Bible. Then Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles come at the end, telling the story of the regathering. They sort of give the wrap-up of the Old Testament from the standpoint of the priesthood and of Jerusalem. They tell the story in a different way than what has been done earlier. It is important to understand the distinction because they focus in on the story in a totally different way than Samuel and Kings.

This final section, particularly the poetic portion of the Writings, in many ways serves to amplify the law. Poetry is easier to memorize than prose because there is a rhyme, a meter. It’s easier to learn a song than it is a page of typed text. A page of typed text would be far harder to memorize than, let’s say, a song that is written out because there is a rhyme, a meter and there’s a poetic quality that makes it more easily committed to memory.

The Psalms, in that sense, were written to be committed to memory. When you commit something to memory, it is easier to meditate upon. The Psalms are written in a poetic and repetitive fashion. It’s totally different than the way that certain other sections of the Bible are written. It is written in an entirely different way. We have to understand that different portions of the Bible are written as they are for a purpose. Some things are written simply in story flow. When you read it through, you are able to get the story flow and derive information from examples and illustrations that are used.

The Psalms are written in a way that they are “food for thought.” They are things to think about. They are written in a poetic fashion, so you can more easily commit them to memory and think about them. You can meditate upon them and turn them over in your mind.

They were utilized both for the expression of the nation or the group in terms of singing praises to

God or singing songs to God. The Psalms represented the national hymnbook for Israel. It was the basis of the liturgy there in the temple as far as the Levitical choir was concerned. They certainly show the importance of music in a society and in a culture because of the fact that God inspired this entire section that can be sung. It is there both to be sung in terms of public praise and songs to God, as well as being there to be read, meditated upon and thought about by the individual.

Proverbs and Job both sort of fit into that category as well. Proverbs has much teaching that is there. The poetry of Job does not come out in most of the English translations in the way that it did in the original, but it is written in a poetic way.

Many of the Festival Scrolls—Song of Solomon, Lamentations, and Ecclesiastes—were all written in a poetic fashion. Ruth and Esther were written more in narrative fashion.

Then, the final post-exilic books were written in narrative fashion, but there is a focus that is there. One thing is that virtually every book in the Writings has a connection with royalty. Psalms primarily was written by King David; Proverbs primarily was written by Solomon, also a king. Job, we are told, was a ruler on some level in the land of Uz (Job 1:1).

Many of the Festival Scrolls had that connection. Certainly, the Song of Solomon did, of course, because Solomon was a king. Ruth sets the stage for the birth of King David. It provides a background for the family of David. It ties in that way. Lamentations is specifically written as a lament for the death of King Josiah; Ecclesiastes was written by King Solomon. Esther was a Queen over the Persian Empire.

Daniel was a prince of Judah and was the number two man in the Babylonian Empire right under Nebuchadnezzar. Ezra came back as the priest; Nehemiah came back as the royal governor governing Judah. Chronicles was written from the standpoint of the Levitical priesthood and the kings of the house of David in Jerusalem. If you go through and compare the story that Chronicles tells—by comparison to Samuel and Kings—you will find that even though the same period is covered, it’s a different story. Chronicles doesn’t focus on the things that Samuel and Kings do.

1 Chronicles focuses primarily on King David. It begins with genealogies. 1 Chronicles 1—9 deal with genealogies that set the stage; the rest of the book deals with the life of King David. When you get to the end of 1 Chronicles, you’re just

getting to the end of David's life and you have an awful lot yet to go.

2 Chronicles focuses primarily on Solomon. It basically focuses briefly on the good kings of Judah. It focuses a little bit on Asa and Jehoshaphat. It particularly focuses in on Hezekiah and Josiah. That pretty well sums up 2 Chronicles.

It focuses in on the times of great revival and the great Passovers that Hezekiah and Josiah had—the great revivals. It is a focus on God's working through the house and throne of David and the Levitical priesthood. It focuses on Jerusalem—on where God was working. It was written to finish up the Hebrew Scriptures and to answer the questions as to where God was authoritatively working because in the aftermath of that, you have three different sets of manuscripts that all claim to represent the Old Testament.

You have what the Samaritans had which is the Samaritan version of the Old Testament. You have what is called the Septuagint, which was a Greek translation found down in Egypt. You had the Masoretic text, or the Hebrew text, that the Jews had preserved. Well, if you read Chronicles, you have no question as to where you need to look. Do you look to the Greeks in Egypt? Do you look to the Samaritans? Or do you look to the Jewish community centered in Jerusalem?

Well, if you read Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles and you have any question about that, I would certainly like to know what it is because there's no way that you can read those books, understand their authority and have any question as to where you want to look for the authoritative text of the Hebrew Scriptures. It makes it plain. It was important that it be made plain because it has been a source of confusion. But those books made plain where God was working. It made plain that He wasn't working in Samaria; He was working in Jerusalem. And Jesus bore witness of that. You remember what He told the woman at the well in Samaria?

John 4:22, “You [Samaritans] worship what you do not know; we [Jews] know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.”

It's unbelievable that we have had some come along over the years (even in the Church) that have questioned that. I think of one in particular who came into a fairly high position and got all “buggy” about the fact that the Septuagint was really where you needed to look. Well, it's no wonder he got off into some of the other things he got off into when he started off there.

This section of the Bible is often overlooked. Most of the books contained here are books that maybe we don't focus on quite as much. Many who focus on the Psalms or Proverbs in the sense of sort of reading it don't fully understand some of the messages.

The book of Psalms is the longest book. It has many authors; King David composed the majority of it. There are a couple of things that I would like to show you on the Psalms. We are going to go through Psalms in a fair amount of detail.

Psalms was traditionally regarded by the Jews to be divided into five books—five books of the Psalms. It was considered one book for the sake of the Biblical canon, but it was comprised of five sections or five books of the Psalms.

The **first** section of the Psalms or Book One consists of Psalms 1—41. Go to the end of Psalm 41. Notice the ending.

Psalm 41:13, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen.”—A double “Amen.” That's the way you tell the section ended.

The **second** section of the Psalms or Book Two of Psalms is Psalms 42—72. It ends the same way.

Psalm 72:19-20, “And blessed be His glorious name forever! And let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen and Amen. The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.”

The **third** section of the Psalms or the Book Three of Psalms is Psalms 73—89.

Psalm 89:52, notice, “Blessed be the Lord forevermore! Amen and Amen.”

Psalms 1—41 is Book One. Psalms 42—72 is Book Two. Psalms 73—89 is Book Three. The **fourth** section, Psalms 90—106 is Book Four and the **fifth** section, Psalms 107-150 is Book Five. Now notice the way Book Four and Book Five end.

Psalm 106:48, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting! And let all the people say, ‘Amen!’” And then you notice, “Praise the Lord!” “Praise the Lord” is translated from a Hebrew word that's pretty commonly known. All of you know at least a couple of Hebrew words. You may not have known that you knew how to speak Hebrew, but every time you say “Amen,” you are speaking Hebrew because “Amen” is a Hebrew word. And there's another Hebrew word I suspect all of you know. “Hallelujah” is a Hebrew word, too, and literally translated it simply means “Praise you the Lord.” Verse 48 ends with “Amen, Hallelujah”—A little

variation on the double “Amen” of sections 1, 2 and 3. The end of the Psalm ends the same way. The last five Psalms, Psalms 146—150, all start with the word “Hallelujah.” They start and end with the “Hallelujah.” That’s why the last five songs of the book of Psalms are called the “Hallelujah Psalms.” The first word and the last word (in Hebrew) is “Hallelujah”—at least in the King James translation. In the King James translation, it is translated “Praise you the Lord.” “Hallelujah” is sometimes just printed out that way—“Hallelujah,” and in other cases, it is translated into English. It was there as a praise. These last five Psalms open and close with “Hallelujah.” There is a sense of completion when you get to the end of Psalm 150.

Psalm 150:6, “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!” In fact, in Psalm 150, every verse contains the expression of praise, so there is that focus.

We find that the theme of “five” runs through the book of Psalms. There are five divisions of the Psalms. The five divisions in the book of Psalms were considered by the Jews to parallel the five books of Moses (the five books of the Torah) as well as the five books of the Festival Scrolls—the five books of the Megillot. The “Megillot” is another name for the Festival Scrolls. *There is a parallel between the five books of the Psalms, the five books of the Torah and the five Festival Scrolls.* Then, when we get down to the end of the book of Psalms, we find the last five Psalms are all Hallelujah Psalms. Even the number of Psalms is a multiple of five—5 times 30—150 Psalms. You find that theme of the number five running through the book of Psalms in an interesting way.

I want to briefly look at the themes of the five books of the Psalms. *Normally, the first Psalm in each book sets the stage for that particular book.* We are going to come back and spend a Bible study on each one of the five books of the Psalms. We are going to break down the book of Psalms down into five sections and spend some time going through each section of Psalms so that we can get a little better understanding.

Let’s notice briefly a little bit of an overview. Psalms 1 and 2 have traditionally been understood by the Jews to sort of set the stage for the whole book of Psalms. **Psalms 1 and 2 contain the theme for the whole book.** The material that is discussed in the book of Psalms is sort of summarized in the first two Psalms. We start out with these two little short Psalms. We find that it talks about the source of blessings.

Psalm 1:1-2, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.”

Psalm 1 tells you that one of the major themes of the Psalms had to do with how to reap God’s blessings.

What does it mean to be blessed? How do you derive that blessing? It has to do with focusing in on God’s law and meditating on that law. The individual who meditates on and puts into practice the law of God in his life is going to be blessed. It makes a contrast between the individual who is blessed (because his focus is on God’s law) and the individual who is not.

Verse 4, “The ungodly are not so,” One of the great contrasts drawn throughout the book of Psalms is the contrast between the godly and the ungodly. In a poetic fashion, over and over and over, we find the distinction drawn in the book of Psalms of the godly and the ungodly—what’s going to be the consequence, the end result of the godly and what’s going to be the end result of the ungodly. Psalm 1 sets the stage by explaining that.

Psalm 2 focuses in on another aspect of the Psalms; many of the Psalms have to do with God stepping into history. Many of the Psalms have prophetic implications, and this is the theme that is expressed in the second Psalm.

Psalm 2:1, “Why do the nations rage, ?...”

Verse 2 talks about God sending the Messiah, His anointed. The word “Messiah” is another Hebrew word that all of you know. It simply means “the Anointed One.” “Christ” is the term we usually use. It is simply the Greek translation of Messiah. “Christ” and “Messiah”—one is the Greek and the other is the Hebrew. We use them as titles, but they are a reference to the Anointed One—the One chosen by God as the Savior, the Messiah, the Christ.

Verse 2 talks about taking council against the Eternal and against His Anointed, against the Messiah, against the Christ. It shows God’s stepping into history and how God looks at puny man maneuvering and manipulating.

Verse 4, God laughs. He looks down and it’s so silly to see puny little man so pompously strutting around and thinking how great and how powerful he is.

The first two Psalms sort of set the stage for all of the other material that is covered in the Psalms. **The theme that runs through the book of Psalms is a poetic comparison between the godly and the ungodly and the consequences**

of each. We have a development and a focus on God's involvement in history. **And, in particular, His ultimate involvement; the culmination of God's involvement in history is His sending of the Messiah—both the first time and the second time.** Those are not the only times God has intervened in history, but that is the culmination (the climax) of God stepping into history. Many of God's mighty deeds and actions of His involvement in the course of human events are celebrated in the Psalms. These two Psalms sort of set the stage for the whole book.

Then we come to the third Psalm, which sets the stage for the first section of the Psalms or Book One of Psalms. Running through this first section of Psalms is a focus on the role of Christ, particularly the role of Christ in His first coming as the Passover lamb. There is a focus on the individual person, the need of the individual for a Savior. There is a focus on the individual.

Many of the experiences of David's life are utilized and are the background from which many of these Psalms are written. And in that way, David was a type of the Messiah. He went through many things that mirrored events that Jesus Himself would later experience. Of course, Christ ultimately came to inherit the throne of His father, David.

Now, I might just comment a little bit about the Psalms in general and about King David's role. David was a remarkable man in a number of ways. One way in which David was a particularly remarkable individual was that David was an exceptionally expressive person. He had the ability to express the wide gamut of feelings and emotions in us in an unusual and remarkable way. Very few do so or have the capacity of doing so in the way that David did. He was an individual who felt everything—the highs and the lows. He felt everything deeply. He was very poetic and a very expressive individual, and as a result, he put into written form the whole gamut of feelings and emotions we don't even know how to quite put into words.

There are times we can't even express what we are feeling. It may be a particular trial. It may be a number of things we are going through, and many times we find it very difficult to even try to put into words what it is we are feeling. We have trouble sorting those feelings out. I'll tell you, if you find yourself in that situation and you open up the book of Psalms, you generally won't have to go very far before you will find a Psalm where

David is putting into words the things that you are feeling but can't quite put into words. That's an important role the Psalms play in our own personal life because David expresses feelings and emotions that many of us have difficulty verbalizing. We have difficulty even recognizing what it is we are feeling.

But you usually don't have to get very far into the book of Psalms before you find that David has put into words—he says and expresses—what you are struggling with inside. It can be the “ups”; it can be the “downs.” It can be the joys and the ecstasy of thanksgiving, of praise, the positive and the “up” emotions. It can be fear, despair or frustration. It can be anguish at looking around and seeing life being so unfair. There is nothing you can go through and experience—everything from the joy and ecstasy of victory and deliverance, to the despair of defeat and the hurts of betrayal—and David expresses all of those. He went through a number of things. A lot of people have gone through many things, but very few people have the ability to really verbalize it.

David was a remarkable man in that he was perhaps the most expressive man. He was not only an emotional individual but also very expressive. He was able to express and verbalize that expression and was able to write it down in a poetic way. He is called in one place “the sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Samuel 23:1). So, the whole gamut of feelings is mirrored in the book of Psalms.

The first section of Psalms is Psalms 1—41. Much of what Jesus said while He was being crucified is quoted from Psalm 22. If you read Psalm 22, you will find that much of it reminds you of statements that Jesus either quoted directly or paraphrased. Psalm 22 is descriptive of the experience of the crucifixion. It was obviously the Psalm that was running through His mind as He hung there because it expressed what He was feeling.

In like manner, I think Psalm 23 makes such a contrast with it and must have expressed the feelings that He had at the time of the resurrection. When you read Psalm 23 with that in mind, you can sort of read it with the shout of exultation and of victory. Psalm 22 ends up with “that He hath done this”; in the Hebrew, it can read “it is finished.” Psalm 23 ends up with “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

Let me just briefly comment on Psalm 3 since that is the one that sort of sets the theme for this section.

Psalm 3:1-4, notice, “Lord, how they have increased who trouble me! Many are they who rise up against me. Many are they who say of me, ‘There is no help for him in God.’ But You, O Lord, are a shield for me, my glory and the One who lifts up my head. I cried to the Lord with my voice, and He heard me from His holy hill.” Psalm 3 focuses on our need for a Savior, and that really sets the stage for this first section of the Psalms.

I might also call your attention to Psalm 37 in this section. If you ever find yourself really frustrated at the unfairness of life and the unfairness of things, go to Psalm 37. You will find that David went through some experiences that focused in on the unfairness of life. One of the things you see is that David expressed a range of the negative emotions—frustration, anger, disappointment and fear—but he didn’t stop with that. He worked through them.

We all feel those things at one time or another. To deny our feelings doesn’t change them. There are times that we do feel angry. There are times we do feel frustrated or scared. There are times that we feel despairing and hopeless. There are times that we feel grief and sorrow. We face and we feel, at one time or another, all the gamut of negative emotions.

While those are places where we all find ourselves at one time or another, they are not the stopping points. They are not the way station along life’s journey where we want to stop and stay for a while. They are places we have to go through. But what is important is that we learn how to work through those feelings, not just “stuffing” them and denying them. We are to work through them and move on beyond them. We are to bring those things to resolution. We are to work through and get it into proper perspective. That’s what David does in the Psalms.

Many of the Psalms start off with an expression of frustration, anger, disappointment, hurt or any number of these feelings. But by the time you get to the end of the Psalms, he has worked through it and the matter has been resolved. As we meditate on the Psalms that are perhaps expressive of how we feel at a given point, they enable us to sort of work through it and come to a resolution.

Now the parallel from the Torah—the *first book of Psalms would parallel with the first book of the Torah*. The first book of the Torah is Genesis. *Genesis focuses on the creation and introduces man’s need for a Savior and the means by which God will provide that Savior.*

That is a theme that runs through the book of Genesis. God introduces the creation for the purpose of introducing man, for the purpose of showing how man sinned, became cut off from God and came to need a Savior. Then, as He picks up the story with the family of Abraham, He begins to work through showing how He is going to provide that Savior. There is a clearer theme of the individual and the need of individual salvation.

The first parallel of the Festival Scrolls is the Song of Solomon. The Song of Solomon was traditionally read at the Passover/Unleavened Bread season, which is the season of the year that focuses on our need for a Savior.

The second section or Book Two of Psalms is Psalms 42—72. The theme shifts from personal experience of one man, to the collective experience of a nation. We have, in that sense, the beginning of the Old Testament Church. Psalm 42 begins this section. Notice the way it opens.

Psalm 42:1-2, “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?” It is talking about the deep thirst that we have and how that deep thirst can be quenched.

You remember, Jesus explained it. He explained it to the woman at the well in Samaria (John 4:6-14). There is only one thing that will quench the deep thirst that is addressed in Psalm 42 and that is God’s Holy Spirit, rivers of living water (John 7:38-39). That is the only thing that can quench that deep thirst.

This second book of the Psalms would parallel the second book of the Torah, Exodus, as well as the second Festival Scroll, Ruth. The second Festival Scroll was read at Pentecost. Pentecost is the story of the outpouring of God’s Holy Spirit. It is the story of God’s covenant relationship, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. It is the story of God calling out a Church, a congregation, a spiritual nation and the ultimate pouring out of His Spirit to provide the quenching of the thirst that is expressed in Psalm 42.

As you go through this section, there are many portions we will come back to at a later time, but I would call your attention to Psalm 68 in this section, which the Jews have traditionally termed the “Pentecost anthem.” *The second book of the Psalms would parallel the book of Exodus, which of course tells the story of the first Pentecost there at Mount Sinai, the giving of the law, the establishment of the covenant that ultimately*

culminates in the beginning of the New Covenant, the outpouring of the Spirit (Acts 2). It also parallels the book of Ruth, which was read at Pentecost. *The story in the book of Ruth is of an individual called out of the world that forsakes her allegiance and loyalties of her old way, embraces the God of Israel and God's truth and becomes an heir of the covenant of promise.* We have this theme that runs through the second section of the Psalms—the second book of the Psalms.

Book Three of Psalms is Psalms 73—89. Psalm 73 has the theme of obedience and avoidance of unclean conduct. *The third book of the Torah is the book of Leviticus.* The book of Leviticus was written for the Levites. It was instruction to the Levites—to the priesthood. What was the responsibility of the priesthood? It was to teach the nation how to be holy. *It was to instruct the nation in holiness and cleanness.* What was the consequence of the Levites and the priesthood's failure to do so? If they had done the job they should have done, the problems that came about wouldn't have come as they did because they did fail to do so. Leviticus contains in it Leviticus 26, the chapter of the blessings and the curses. Leviticus 26 is the story of what would happen if the priesthood failed to convey to the nation how to be holy. Leviticus is the third book of the Torah.

The third book of the Festival Scrolls is Lamentations. It is a lament for what happened to the nation as a consequence of the failure of the people to practice Leviticus. The theme of Leviticus is to be holy for God is holy (Leviticus 11:44-45). The job of the priesthood was to teach the people to discern between the holy and the profane, the clean and the unclean (Ezekiel 44:15, 23-24). It was to teach the people to make distinctions between what is appropriate and what is inappropriate, what is holy and what is profane, what is clean and what is unclean. That was their responsibility. The priesthood failed in their duty and the temple was ultimately destroyed, the priesthood was taken into captivity and Jerusalem was destroyed. The book of Lamentations is a lament about that and, in that sense, the events that it describes are prophetic of the Great Tribulation. They were a type of the Tribulation.

Interestingly, nearly the entire third book of Psalms is written by priests. Psalm 73 starts out, "A Psalm of Asaph." Now, if you go back and do a little checking on Asaph, you will find that Asaph was in charge of the Levitical singers. He was one of the priests in charge of music in the

temple. Psalms 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83—all of those are songs of Asaph.

Psalms 84, 85, 87, 88 are for the sons of Korah who were part of the Levitical choir. Nearly all of the Psalms in this section were written either for or by priests. There is a priestly theme that runs through this section that, in many ways, parallels the book of Leviticus and, certainly, there are parallels with Lamentations, the third Festival Scroll.

Psalm 73:1-2, which sets the theme for the third section, says, "Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped." He said he was getting on a slippery slope; he was slipping up. Have you ever felt like that? Have you ever felt like your connection, in terms of God and the Church, were getting on sort of a slippery ground? Have you ever felt like you weren't as firm-footed as you wish you were?

He expresses why he felt that way.

Verse 3, "For I was envious of the boastful [KJV, "foolish"], when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." He said he really got into an attitude problem because he looked at people who were putting forth no effort to obey God, and he was envious. It seemed to him those people were getting by with all kinds of things, and he saw the wicked who were prospering. Have you ever seen anybody wicked prosper? The world is filled with wicked who prosper. And it's easy, sometimes, if we are not careful, that our attitude can get askew. He described finding himself on a slippery slope. He was not as well positioned, as steady and stable, as he wished he were. But rather, he was beginning to develop an envy at what was seemingly the "easy time" that some of these people were having.

Verse 5, "They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men." It seems like some of the ones that are getting by the easiest are the worst. That's the way it is. Just because somebody is a crook and a shyster, doesn't mean they come down plagued with cancer, heart disease and everything else all at the same time. Sometimes they live to be 95. That's of and by itself. There are times when it may seem like they are making a lot of money.

He continues and he describes what he saw.

Verse 16, "When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me..." 'It was really bothering me. It hurt to look at all of this.'

Verse 17, "Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end." Now he

begins to get it into perspective. He says he went into the sanctuary (the temple) and then he began to get it into perspective. He began to consider the end and to realize that even though they may seemingly be getting by with it now for a while, they are ultimately the ones that are going to be in the slippery places and are going to be cast down to destruction.

Verses 21-22, he then begins to feel foolish for the attitude that he was having. You can go through Psalm 73. He sets the stage. This is the point that the priesthood should have gotten across to the people. This was important and, in many ways, sums up a great deal of the perspective from which the book of Leviticus and Lamentations should be read.

We are obviously going to come back and go through each of these sections closely, so I am just skimming now for the sake of time.

Book Four of Psalms is Psalms 90—106. Much of this particular section of Psalms—the *fourth book of Psalms—parallels the fourth book of the Torah which is Numbers and the fourth book of the Festival Scrolls which is Ecclesiastes*. Ecclesiastes was read at the Feast of Tabernacles, which is a type of the millennial reign of Jesus Christ. **We find in this section many of the Psalms that describe the millennial conditions that will come to Israel and to all nations when God reigns on the earth.**

Psalm 90 sets the stage for that. The first Psalm in this section sets the theme.

Psalm 90:1-4, “Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God. You turn man to destruction, and say, ‘Return, O children of men.’ For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night.”

This is the first place the expression “a thousand years” is referred to. It is a very vague sort of reference. Peter quotes and paraphrases Psalm 90:4.

2 Peter 3:8, “...with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” Peter makes it a little plainer. He says that a day is equivalent to a thousand years in God’s plan. It remains yet for the Apostle John in the book of Revelation to clearly state that the reign of the Messiah is for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4-6).

We have talked about the Millennium and used the term so often that I think many are not really

aware of the fact that, apart from the book of Revelation, you can find no clear statement that says the reign of the Messiah is going to last for a thousand years. If you had the entire Bible except for the book of Revelation, you would find no clear statement.

Now, the Jews had traditions that pointed in that direction. Peter alluded to it in 2 Peter 3. He paraphrased Psalm 90. But Psalm 90 is pretty vague. If you didn’t have what Peter said in 2 Peter 3 and if you didn’t have what John wrote in Revelation 20, you would be hard-pressed to have it really clear in your mind that the time of the Messiah’s reign is a thousand years. It’s a little vague if Psalm 90:4 was all you had to go on. Peter paraphrased it and made it a little plainer. John stated it clearly. When you read what John said and then look at what Peter said, you realize the comparison of a thousand years and a day and a seven-day week. Then you look here at Psalm 90 and you see sort of a reference that sets the stage.

Psalm 90:12, “So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” The point is that time is limited for human beings. Even the Millennium is limited. A thousand years is a limited, finite time. When God deals with human beings, He deals in terms of a finite period of time. We all have to learn to number our days. We are to make best use of the time we have. We are not to assume our days are going to go on interminably because our days do have a termination. We need to learn to number our days and to apply our hearts to wisdom. We are to use each day to the full, to focus in and to utilize each day.

Look at the parallel. *The book of Numbers dealt with Israel’s wandering in the wilderness, the time when Israel dwelt in booths (temporary dwellings) and God provided all their needs.* In Leviticus 23, when the Holy Days were outlined, one of the things that Israel was told about the Feast of Tabernacles was that they were to dwell in booths during the Feast of Tabernacles. It was a reminder of the time they dwelt in booths during the wandering in the wilderness (Leviticus 23:42-43). The book of Numbers is the story of that time period.

Ecclesiastes is the book of the Festival Scrolls that focuses in on a lesson that has to be learned—the lesson that there is a need for something beyond the physical. It ends up with a focus on teaching us to number our days.

Ecclesiastes 12:1, “Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, ...” It ends up with the fact that we need to be responsible.

Much of the theme of this section of the Psalms deals with the time when God reigns on the earth.

Psalm 93:1, “The Lord reigns,”

Psalm 99:1, “The Lord reigns;”

Actually, Psalms 92, 95, 96, 97, 98 and 99 are all Psalms that the Jews call the “Sabbath Songs” that made up a part of the liturgy every Sabbath in the temple. And it was felt that those Psalms focused in on the millennial fulfillment of the Sabbath because they understood that the weekly Sabbath was a weekly reminder of the time of the Messiah’s reign.

Psalm 107 begins Book Five of Psalms (107—150) and, in that sense, sums up the material from the preceding four books. *Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the Torah, sums up what had been said before and brings it up to a people who could literally stand on the river bank and see their salvation.* They see the Promised Land. Deuteronomy is given to people who were within sight of the fulfillment and the realization of the promises.

The book of Esther was normally read in the 12th month of the Hebrew calendar, the month Adar (February/March). It was read at the celebration of Purim, which was a celebration of God’s deliverance—the story of which is told in the book of Esther. *The parallel book of Esther ends up when God had saved His people and there was great rejoicing.* We find that everybody, even a lot of the Persians, desired to be a Jew, too, because they could see the way that God was working. There is a focus on celebration of salvation in the physical sense in the book of Esther. The fifth book of the Psalms ends up with that. **It is sort of a recap of material that has been covered and ends up with the “Hallelujah” Psalms, which is clearly a focus on a celebration of God’s salvation.**

Psalm 107 sets the theme.

Psalm 107:1-2, “Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy...” It is focused on a celebration of God’s redemption and, also, there is a recap in this final fifth section of much of the previous material. In that way, there is a parallel to Deuteronomy and Esther.

There are various categories in the Psalms. Many of the Psalms are Psalms of praise. This is a major theme that runs throughout the entire book—praise to God for His great work, the deliverance of His people, His mercy, His

benefits and blessings. *Praise is a major theme that runs through the book of Psalms.*

A second theme that runs through the book of Psalms is contrition. The theme of suffering (both for individuals and for the nation) and the understanding that personal and national calamity is a consequence of sin. Confession, pleas of mercy and forgiveness run throughout this section. This theme of contrition (of repentance), a desire for mercy, forgiveness, our need for deliverance and restoration runs through the book. Praise is perhaps the major theme of the Psalms. Contrition is a minor theme.

Another theme is the ethics that are taught.

Several of the Psalms are of an instructive nature. They give instruction concerning the things that God’s people are to do and not to do. We have seen that this entire section has a lot of material packed in it. We are going to spend the next five Bible studies going through the Psalms. We are going to go through it, spending one Bible study on each one of the five books of the Psalms. The next Bible study we will cover the first 41 Psalms. We will spend a number of Bible studies on the Psalms. We will spend several on Proverbs (probably about three Bible studies on Proverbs) and then begin to pick up some speed. We will have a Bible study on each one of the five Festival Scrolls. We will have an entire Bible study for each of those books so we can spend some time and perhaps deepen our understanding of some of this section of the Bible that maybe does not get quite as much focus. There’s an awful lot that’s packed in here. It is a beautiful section of Scripture. There is a beauty, a rhythm of poetry and a depth of expression that is there. There are many, many important lessons and important principles that are illustrated. I think, as we read this section, we will find so much that can tie in and be helpful to us in our everyday Christian life.

So, with that, we will conclude our Bible study this evening.