

**OneBook.**

DAILY - WEEKLY

# The Psalms • Part II

Brian D. Russell



AN EIGHT-WEEK BIBLE STUDY

**OneBook.**

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DAILY - WEEKLY

# **The Psalms · Part II**

**Brian D. Russell**



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## WELCOME TO ONEBOOK DAILY-WEEKLY

John Wesley, in a letter to one of his leaders, penned the following:

O begin! Fix some part of every day for private exercises. You may acquire the taste which you have not: what is tedious at first, will afterwards be pleasant. Whether you like it or not, read and pray daily. It is for your life; there is no other way; else you will be a trifler all your days. . . . Do justice to your own soul; give it time and means to grow. Do not starve yourself any longer. Take up your cross and be a Christian altogether.

Rarely are our lives most shaped by our biggest ambitions and highest aspirations. Rather, our lives are most shaped, for better or for worse, by those small things we do every single day.

At Seedbed, our biggest ambition and highest aspiration is to resource the followers of Jesus to become lovers and doers of the Word of God every single day, to become people of One Book.

To that end, we have created the OneBook Daily-Weekly. First, it's important to understand what this is not: warm, fuzzy, sentimental devotions. If you engage the Daily-Weekly for any length of time, you will learn the Word of God. You will grow profoundly in your love for God, and you will become a passionate lover of people.

### **How does the Daily-Weekly work?**

*Daily.* As the name implies, every day invites a short but substantive engagement with the Bible. Five days a week you will read a passage of Scripture followed by a short segment of teaching and closing with a question for reflection and self-examination. On the sixth day, you will review and reflect on the previous five days.

*Weekly.* Each week, on the seventh day, find a way to gather with at least one other person doing the study. Pursue the weekly guidance for gathering. Share learning, insight, encouragement, and most important, how the Holy Spirit is working in your lives.

## Welcome to OneBook Daily-Weekly

That's it. Depending on the length of the study, when the eight or twelve weeks are done, we will be ready with the next study. On an ongoing basis we will release new editions of the Daily-Weekly. Over time, those who pursue this course of learning will develop a rich library of Bible learning resources for the long haul.

OneBook Daily-Weekly will develop eight- and twelve-week studies that cover the entire Old and New Testaments. Seedbed will publish new studies regularly so that an ongoing supply of group lessons will be available. All titles will remain accessible, which means they can be used in any order that fits your needs or the needs of your group.

If you are looking for a substantive study to learn Scripture through a steadfast method, look no further.



# WEEK ONE

## Book II: Finding Hope in the Psalms of Korah

### ONE

## Welcome to Books II and III of the Psalter

**Key Observation.** Books II and III of Psalms point us away from human rulers to focus on trust in the Lord alone.

**Understanding the Word.** Welcome to our journey through Book II (Pss. 42–72) and Book III (Pss. 73–89). Books II and III of Psalms serve a key function within the whole. In *OneBook Daily-Weekly The Psalms—Part I*, we observed the overall movement of the book by beginning with a study of the Psalter’s introduction (Pss. 1–2) and conclusion (Pss. 146–150). The Psalter opens by grounding God’s people in faithfulness through meditation on Scripture (Ps. 1) and ultimate security through God’s reign over the nations through the Messiah (Ps. 2). The Psalter’s climax (146–150) is a celebration of God’s victory in which all creation joins together to praise the Lord.

In Psalms 3–145, life happens. The Psalter serves as our prayer book as God’s missional people. God calls us to live as his hands, feet, and mouthpieces in the world. As people seeking to embody the gospel, we are God’s witnesses to a world that does not yet know or worship the Lord. Given this reality, life brings challenges. Sometimes these challenges are our own doing because of unfaithfulness. Other times, God’s people find themselves in seasons of chaos through the evil intentions of enemies, bouts with illness, or catastrophic events. In all circumstances, the book of Psalms awaits our careful reading. As

Scripture, its words give us a voice to praise the Lord and to cry out for God's salvation. Through the Psalter's pages we will encounter a language of faith that can sustain us in our journey.

In Book I, we encountered a mix of cries for help (laments); anchoring psalms that reminded God's people of the importance of Scripture and instruction (Torah psalms); rich praises for who God is (praise); expressions of gratitude for answers to prayer (thanksgiving); hymns about God's Messiah (royal psalms); and affirmations of deep trust (psalms of trust).

Books II and III reveal that the final compilers of the Psalms showed careful thought in how they arranged the whole. If Book I mostly contains psalms bearing a heading that includes the phrase "Of David," it is striking that Books II and III introduce two new phrases in their headings: "Of Asaph" and "Of the Sons of Korah." Asaph and Korah were both important Levitical priests, and their families served as singers and liturgists in the temple. If we step back and just observe these headings, we find that Books II and III are organized by them. Notice how the blocks of psalms linked to Korah and Asaph form bookends around the central block of Davidic material in Psalms 51–72 and Psalm 86:

Psalms 42–49: Korah

Psalm 50: Asaph

Psalms 51–72: David

Psalms 73–83: Asaph

Psalms 84–85: Korah

Psalm 86: David

Psalms 87–88: Korah

This places the focus in these books on Israel's trust in God's reign through King David and his descendants. Yet we will find that this trust created a crisis of faith. In the Davidic psalms, the king was under constant stress. Moreover, in Book III, there will be a national crisis of faith in light of the exile to Babylon. These psalms will invite God's people to find security in God alone.

1. Reflect on your life. In whom or in what do you find true security?
2. What is your present sense of your journey of faith in Jesus?

## TWO

### Psalm 42

**Psalm 42 (ESV)** *As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. <sup>2</sup>My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? <sup>3</sup>My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, “Where is your God?” <sup>4</sup>These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I would go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God with glad shouts and songs of praise, a multitude keeping festival.*

*<sup>5</sup>Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation <sup>6</sup>and my God. My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar. <sup>7</sup>Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me. <sup>8</sup>By day the LORD commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life. <sup>9</sup>I say to God, my rock: “Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” <sup>10</sup>As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me all the day long, “Where is your God?”*

*<sup>11</sup>Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.*

**Key Observation.** Putting our hope in the living God is foundational for the life of faith.

**Understanding the Word.** Book II of the Psalter opens with a psalm rich in meaning. It captures the essence of the faith that we will discover in Psalms 42–89. It begins with the image of a thirsty deer longing for cool waters of a pristine stream. The psalmist likened this to his soul’s desire for a fresh encounter with God. Psalms 42 and 43 highlight a conversation between the psalmist and his soul.

The psalmist referred to “soul” throughout the prayer (vv. 1, 2, 4–6, and 11). It is important to understand the meaning of the Hebrew word *nephesh* that is translated “soul.” Too often we equate soul with the spiritual part of ourselves that is separate from our physical body. This is a misunderstanding

of the biblical concept. When the psalmist talked about soul, he was talking about the whole of himself as a living, breathing person. When the psalmist said, “My soul thirsts for God” (42:2), he was saying that all aspects of his being (mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional) are desperate for God. His words expressed a desire to connect fully with God. He felt separated from God and longed for a time to be in God’s presence.

The psalmist was desperate for God because of taunts from unnamed enemies (v. 3) and because of memories of worship (v. 4). The psalmist recalled moments at the temple when God’s people celebrated the protective care of the Lord. In other words, the psalmist longed for the communal worship of God and the feelings of security that God provides. The absence of this caused the psalmist’s grief and trouble.

In verse 5, we find the chorus that recurs three times within Psalm 42 (vv. 5 and 11) and Psalm 43 (v. 5)—“Why are you cast down, O my soul?” In response to his distress, the psalmist questioned his despair and encouraged himself to place hope in God. This will be a key reminder for God’s people. There will be difficult times personally and communally. But there remains one source of hope: the living God. In the Old Testament, God’s people remembered the God of the exodus; in the New Testament, God’s people focus on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The psalmist built on his hope in the Lord by anticipating future opportunities to praise God for his salvation. A consistent theme in the Psalter is the ability for God’s people to praise God even in the midst of difficult circumstance.

Verses 6–10 provide more details about the psalmist’s plight and prayer. He was geographically far from Jerusalem (v. 6). The mighty roar of the headwaters of the Jordan River reminded the psalmist of his smallness and frailty in the world (v. 7). In response, he confessed his knowledge of God’s ongoing love as well as his recognition that God is the source and grounding of his life (v. 8). On the basis of this relationship, the psalmist cried out to God to act on his behalf against his foes (vv. 9–10).

Psalm 42:11 ends the prayer with the same refrain as in verse 5.

1. What do you desire most in the world? How is this desire similar to or different from the psalmist’s longing for God?

2. What is your most meaningful worship experience? How did it shape you?

## THREE

### Psalm 43

**Psalm 43** *Vindicate me, my God, and plead my cause against an unfaithful nation. Rescue me from those who are deceitful and wicked. <sup>2</sup>You are God my stronghold. Why have you rejected me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy? <sup>3</sup>Send me your light and your faithful care, let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. <sup>4</sup>Then I will go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God.*

<sup>5</sup>*Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.*

**Key Observation.** We respond to God's grace with praise and worship.

**Understanding the Word.** Based on the repetition of a common refrain (42:5, 11, and 43:5), it appears that Psalms 42 and 43 were originally one psalm. Psalm 43 completes the lament begun in Psalm 42. If Psalm 42 focused on the psalmist's plight, Psalm 43 centers on the psalmist's cry for help. In Psalm 42, we learned that the psalmist was under the oppression of enemies far from the temple and longed to praise God in the temple with fellow believers.

The psalmist's lament was bold and daring. Verse 1 is the language of the courtroom. The psalmist asked God to make a summary judgment by affirming his innocence. The psalmist recognized two realities. First, he asserted his innocence. This is a common theme in the Psalms, but can sound arrogant or even naive to our twenty-first-century ears. Second, the psalmist was resolute that God could and *should* save him. Thus, he begged God to do so.

In verse 2, the psalmist confessed that God is his *stronghold* (or, *refuge* in the ESV). This is the grounding for the psalmist's confidence and hope. But

God does not seem to be living up to his reputation. Why does it seem as though God has rejected the psalmist and left him oppressed and mourning in the presence of enemies?

The heart of the psalmist is evident in verses 3–4. Obviously the psalmist desired deliverance. But note the purpose of the deliverance. He desired to praise God with the faithful. Therefore, the psalmist called on God to send illumination and faithfulness as guides through the present darkness. First John will later affirm that “God is light” (1:5) and “God is love” (4:8). These are reminders for us as we journey through the world. Regardless of the challenges and the present darkness we may face, God’s core essence remains light and love.

The purpose of the psalmist’s pleadings was to gain him the opportunity to worship God in Jerusalem. The psalmist demonstrated a pious desire to worship God in the place that the Lord chose—Jerusalem. This was a key theme in Psalm 42 as well. Psalms 42–43 hold a high opinion of regular and enthusiastic worship of God by his people. Verse 4 serves both as an indication of the purpose of the psalmist’s deliverance and also a promise by the psalmist to respond to God’s grace and salvation with praise and worship. This is a core value and model for us. God acts—we give thanks and worship.

Psalm 43 ends with the psalmist’s self-talk (see 42:5, 11) to remain dialed into God.

1. What kind of person do we have to become to be able to plead our innocence before God with integrity?
2. What role does worship play in the psalmist’s desire for God?

## FOUR

### Psalm 44

**Psalm 44** *We have heard it with our ears, O God; our ancestors have told us what you did in their days, in days long ago. <sup>2</sup>With your hand you drove out the nations and planted our ancestors; you crushed the peoples and made our ancestors flourish. <sup>3</sup>It was not by their sword that they won the land, nor did their arm*

*bring them victory; it was your right hand, your arm, and the light of your face, for you loved them.*

*<sup>4</sup>You are my King and my God, who decrees victories for Jacob. <sup>5</sup>Through you we push back our enemies; through your name we trample our foes. <sup>6</sup>I put no trust in my bow, my sword does not bring me victory; <sup>7</sup>but you give us victory over our enemies, you put our adversaries to shame. <sup>8</sup>In God we make our boast all day long, and we will praise your name forever.*

*<sup>9</sup>But now you have rejected and humbled us; you no longer go out with our armies. <sup>10</sup>You made us retreat before the enemy, and our adversaries have plundered us. <sup>11</sup>You gave us up to be devoured like sheep and have scattered us among the nations. <sup>12</sup>You sold your people for a pittance, gaining nothing from their sale.*

*<sup>13</sup>You have made us a reproach to our neighbors, the scorn and derision of those around us. <sup>14</sup>You have made us a byword among the nations; the peoples shake their heads at us. <sup>15</sup>I live in disgrace all day long, and my face is covered with shame <sup>16</sup>at the taunts of those who reproach and revile me, because of the enemy, who is bent on revenge.*

*<sup>17</sup>All this came upon us, though we had not forgotten you; we had not been false to your covenant. <sup>18</sup>Our hearts had not turned back; our feet had not strayed from your path. <sup>19</sup>But you crushed us and made us a haunt for jackals; you covered us over with deep darkness.*

*<sup>20</sup>If we had forgotten the name of our God or spread out our hands to a foreign god, <sup>21</sup>would not God have discovered it, since he knows the secrets of the heart? <sup>22</sup>Yet for your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.*

*<sup>23</sup>Awake, Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever.*

*<sup>24</sup>Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression?*

*<sup>25</sup>We are brought down to the dust; our bodies cling to the ground. <sup>26</sup>Rise up and help us; rescue us because of your unfailing love.*

**Key Observation.** During difficult seasons, God's people must pray confidently to the God who has shown his grace and mercy in the past.

**Understanding the Word.** Psalm 44 is a prayer for help by the entire community. "We" is the subject of many of the lines in this prayer. Communal psalms will become more common as we move deeper into the Psalter. As

we will soon see, Books II and III of the Psalter begin to focus on a national crisis facing God's people. Book II opens with two related individual cries for help to God. Psalm 44 moves us beyond the individual to a cry for help by the entire community. Psalm 44 includes a mix of historical reflection on what God has done in the past (vv. 1–8), confusion over God's inaction in the present (vv. 9–16), the pleading of the innocence of God's people in keeping covenant (vv. 17–22), and a final plea for help (vv. 23–26).

The psalm opens with the community remembering God's gracious acts of salvation in the past (vv. 1–8). Specifically for God's people in the Old Testament, this meant reflection on the exodus from Egypt and the gift of the land of Canaan (vv. 1–2). The psalmist emphasized that these were the actions of God alone (vv. 3–8). God gifted Israel all of the blessings enjoyed by the people of God. Likewise as followers of Jesus, we focus on his life, death, and resurrection as the foundation for our relationship and identity as God's missional people. These opening lines remind us that we are recipients of God's kindness and love. How do we respond to God's graciousness? With praise and thanksgiving (v. 8).

Our psalm takes a surprising turn in verses 9–16. Despite God's past graciousness, God's people are presently experiencing humiliation and defeat. Verse 11 is powerful: "You gave us up to be devoured like sheep and have scattered us among the nations." God's people suffered the taunting of enemies. In the ancient world, one of the most potent taunts was, "Where is your god?" The enemies of Israel believed that their ability to defeat God's people showed the Lord's weakness and ineffectiveness. This heightened the misery of God's people.

In verses 17–22, God's people pled their innocence. They had practiced faithfulness and not forgotten their covenant relationship with the Lord (v. 17). They had carefully kept their hearts clean and in tune with God (vv. 18–21). God's people asserted their innocence both in their external actions and in their thoughts. How then could they be suffering at the hands of their enemies (v. 22)?

As we live together as God's missional people, we may well face seasons corporately when the world seems against us and God appears absent or unconcerned. Have you ever been there? How do we pray in such times?



Verses 23–26 model a poignant prayer of desperation for God. God has acted in the past. God’s love is real and is the final force in history. Therefore, even when all may seem lost, we pray confidently to the One who can save us.

1. Reflect on your community of faith’s history with God. How does God’s past work within your congregation serve to encourage you today?
2. How does Psalm 44 serve as a model for praying as a community to God during difficult seasons?

## FIVE

### Psalm 45

**Psalm 45** *My heart is stirred by a noble theme as I recite my verses for the king; my tongue is the pen of a skillful writer.*

<sup>2</sup>*You are the most excellent of men and your lips have been anointed with grace, since God has blessed you forever.*

<sup>3</sup>*Gird your sword on your side, you mighty one; clothe yourself with splendor and majesty.* <sup>4</sup>*In your majesty ride forth victoriously in the cause of truth, humility and justice; let your right hand achieve awesome deeds.* <sup>5</sup>*Let your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of the king’s enemies; let the nations fall beneath your feet.* <sup>6</sup>*Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.* <sup>7</sup>*You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.* <sup>8</sup>*All your robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia; from palaces adorned with ivory the music of the strings makes you glad.* <sup>9</sup>*Daughters of kings are among your honored women; at your right hand is the royal bride in gold of Ophir.*

<sup>10</sup>*Listen, daughter, and pay careful attention: Forget your people and your father’s house.* <sup>11</sup>*Let the king be enthralled by your beauty; honor him, for he is your lord.* <sup>12</sup>*The city of Tyre will come with a gift, people of wealth will seek your favor.* <sup>13</sup>*All glorious is the princess within her chamber; her gown is interwoven with gold.* <sup>14</sup>*In embroidered garments she is led to the king; her virgin*

*companions follow her—those brought to be with her. <sup>15</sup>Led in with joy and gladness, they enter the palace of the king.*

*<sup>16</sup>Your sons will take the place of your fathers; you will make them princes throughout the land.*

*<sup>17</sup>I will perpetuate your memory through all generations; therefore the nations will praise you for ever and ever.*

**Key Observation.** Israel's Davidic king modeled holiness and led God's mission in the world.

**Understanding the Word.** Psalm 45 is a hymn of praise for the wedding of Israel's king. It celebrates kingship. In the Psalter, songs about the king serve as reminders of security. The king functioned as God's agent for administering and leading God's kingdom. The king was God's anointed one (or messiah). Royal songs also serve as symbols of hope. As Christians, we read the royal psalms in the knowledge that Jesus fulfills the longings of these prayers.

Verse 1 gives us direct insight about the psalm's author. One of the sons of Korah enjoyed the honor of composing a psalm in the king's honor. This psalm flows out of the psalmist's being. As we cultivate praise, gratitude, and prayer through faithful practice, we are able to experience these as a natural outflow of our connection with God.

The remainder of the psalm divides into two sections: verses 2–6 and 7–16, with verse 17 serving as a conclusion. These two sections are blessings over the king in two areas: his power to rule over God's kingdom and his ability to reproduce sons who will rule after him. These two themes flow out of God's promises to David in 2 Samuel 7:8–16. Israel's hope is, in part, centered on God's establishment of David and his descendants as the rulers for God's people.

In verses 2–6, the psalmist prayed a word of blessing over the power of the king. First, the psalmist praised the king for his appearance. The king appeared in the splendor of battle gear. But the key attribute is not appearance or pure power, but mission. All ancient kingdoms boasted about their kings' power. This psalm celebrates God's victories through the king, but notice the language of verse 4. The king modeled virtues that demonstrate God's holiness: truth, humility, and justice. Israel's messiah led God's mission. This was not about defeating enemies for exploitation and conquest, but to defend the mission

of God's people to bless the nations by spreading the knowledge of God (see Genesis 12:3; Exodus 19:4–6; cf. 1 Samuel 17:46). It is vital to remember that God was not for his people *against* the nations but for his people *for the sake* of the nations.

Second, verse 6 celebrates the eternal security of God's throne and Davidic rule. In Psalm 89, there is a lament over the loss of Davidic rule during exile (see Week 8), but in the long view of God's work, it is truth. Jesus embodies and fulfills this vision (see Hebrews 1:8).

The second half of the Psalm (vv. 7–16) celebrates the king's marriage and sons whom the queen will bear. This speaks of Israel's historic kings. As Christians, we read this as a symbol for Jesus' work "in bringing many sons and daughters to glory" (Heb. 2:10).

Verse 17 is a fitting climax. Generations of God's people will remember the king, and the nations will praise him. This envisions the fulfillment of God's mission to bless the nations and foreshadows the Psalter's vision for praise by all living beings (see Psalm 150:6).

1. How is Israel's vision of its king different from typical understandings of kingship?
2. How does Jesus fulfill Psalm 45's words?

## WEEK ONE

# GATHERING DISCUSSION OUTLINE

- A. Open session in prayer.
- B. View video for this week's reading.
- C. What general impressions and thoughts do you have after considering the video and reading the daily writings on these Scriptures? What, specifically, did this week's psalms teach you about faith, life, and prayer?
- D. Discuss selected questions from the daily readings. Always invite class members to share key insights or to raise questions that they found to be the most meaningful.
  - 1. **KEY OBSERVATION:** Books II and III of the Psalms point us away from human rulers to focus on trust in the Lord alone.  
**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Reflect on your life. In whom or in what do you find true security?
  - 2. **KEY OBSERVATION (PSALM 42):** Putting our hope in the living God is foundational for the life of faith.  
**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** What do you desire most in the world? How is this desire similar to or different from the psalmist's longing for God?
  - 3. **KEY OBSERVATION (PSALM 43):** We respond to God's grace with praise and worship.

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** What role does worship play in the psalmist's desire for God?

- 4. KEY OBSERVATION (PSALM 44):** During difficult seasons, God's people must pray confidently to the God who has shown his grace and mercy in the past.

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Reflect on your community of faith's history with God. How does God's past work within your congregation serve to encourage you today?

- 5. KEY OBSERVATION (PSALM 45):** Israel's Davidic king modeled holiness and led God's mission in the world.

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** How is Israel's vision of its king different from typical understandings of kingship?

- E.** Close session with prayer.