

TERM TWO PART TWO

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

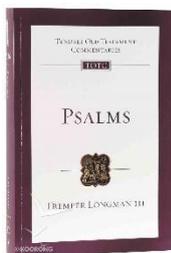
THE **PSALMS** ON SEASONS OF CHANGE

SMALL GROUP RESOURCE

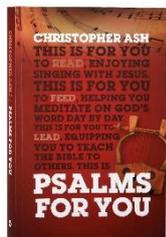
SERIES SUMMARY

PREACHING DATE	TITLE	PASSAGE
14/6/20	Understanding power	Psalm 2
21/6/20	Understanding our place	Psalm 8
28/6/20	Understanding our path	Psalm 23
5/7/20	Understanding our planet	Psalm 46
12/7/20	Understanding our Provider	Psalm 139

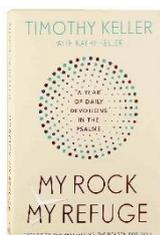
RESOURCES



Longman III, T. *Psalms* (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries)



Ash, C. *Psalms For You*



Keller, T. *My Rock, My Refuge: A year of daily devotions in the psalms*

OVERVIEW

THE PSALMS: AN INVITATION TO LEARN TO PRAY

The book of Psalms has, through the highs and lows of history, been a treasure trove of prayers for God's people. We find prayers of lament (i.e. crying out to God), prayers of adoration, thanksgiving, repentance, recommitment and more. The ambiguity of the context of most of the psalms invites us to carry them into our own context, through the lens of who Jesus is and what he's done (cf. Luke 24:44).¹

When understood together with Psalm 1, Psalm 2 forms the introduction and doorway into the entire book. We are encouraged to meditate on God's law (or Word) and to seek refuge in his Son (or Word incarnate), for there we find true blessing (1:1-2; 2:12). Indications of such blessings are found throughout the book and culminate in praise to God (i.e. 'Hallelujahs', Psalms 145-150), reflective of the book's Hebrew title meaning 'praises'.

As Christians, we therefore have the unique privilege of understanding and using the psalms as prayers to Jesus, the prayers of Jesus and finally our own prayers through Jesus and in his name to the Father, in the power of the Spirit.²

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

As well as giving us words to pray, the psalms take our words and frame them in the light of who God is, his promises and his purposes. In a word, they offer us 'wisdom'. We therefore have ample reason to study the psalms in order to seek understanding of our world, ourselves, and the people around us – all under the loving rule and reign of God.

Each psalm has therefore been selected to provide biblical perspective for living in this season of change. As we look forward to further easing of restrictions, God's Word encourages us to look forward to lasting hope in Christ rather than simply a return to 'the familiar':

Psalm 2 especially highlights the opportunistic power plays nations are engaging in, as leaders take advantage of their COVID-given authority. But who is truly in charge?

Psalm 8 seeks to understand the place of humanity in the world emerging out of COVID. Is our potential just economic? What gains about our identity can we make in a season where so many of our foundations have been exposed for their temporal nature?

Psalm 23 is a psalm about direction and guidance. Even in the virus' shadow of death, what confidence can we have about the way ahead?

Psalm 46 addresses a fragile world whose vulnerabilities have once again been exposed, this time on a global scale. How do we understand creation's purpose when it seems so prone to breakdown?

Psalm 139 reveals there is not a moment we face that God is not prepared to invest in. In a world where it is assumed he is at a distance, if he exists at all, what can we know about his presence and his purposes?

¹ See Ash's excellent introduction in *Psalms For You*.

² For more see Longman's introduction in his commentary.

We are therefore invited to seek understanding in our lives and our world through prayer. This was in fact at the heart of many of the Apostle Paul's prayers for God's people, e.g.

*I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of **wisdom** and revelation, so that you may **know him better**. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may **know the hope to which he has called you**, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. **Ephesians 1:18-19***

STUDY ONE

UNDERSTANDING POWER | PSALM 2

OVERVIEW

Who is truly in charge? This is the question that Psalm 2 raises and answers in the person of God's 'anointed', or chosen king (v 2, 6). Psalm 2 is a royal psalm the Israelites would have read at the accession of a new king. It tells of the supremacy of Israel's king over against the rulers of surrounding nations; not because of any power or glory intrinsic to their king but because of the God who has appointed him. Like a play with actors, the psalm can be broken down into four parts, as follows:

1. Rebel power (v 1-3)

The psalmist opens with a question: 'Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot *in vain*?' We only have to read the next verse to get his answer. The vanity of their plotting and conspiring for power and position is in vain because they're ultimately doing so in rebellion and insurrection against the God of Israel and his king. All human-centred power grabs ultimately come to nothing when understood in the light of God and the human king he has appointed to rule.

2. Rebuking power (v 4-6)

Do the various plots, speeches and power moves of world leaders surprise or worry God? The answer is a resounding 'no!' He 'laughs' and 'scoffs' from his heavenly throne. God's act of installing his king becomes an act of rebuke and wrath because true power is received, not a result of war or revolution. This is most clearly the case between earthly rulers and the One who rules from heaven. 'Zion' was the mountain (or hill) where Israel's king lived in Jerusalem; an earthly copy of the heavenly reality, the place of all God's redeemed people in Christ (Hebrews 12:18-24; cf. 1 Peter 2:9-10).

3. Ruling power (v 7-9)

Herein lies the reason God's anointed reigns supreme over all other earthly rulers: he is God's son. These verses recall God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7, of a descendent who will forever reign on the throne. These verses also cast our eyes forward to the baptism of 'the Messiah' or 'Christ' (Hebrew and Greek translations of 'anointed'), recorded in the New Testament gospels (Matthew 3:16-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22). We are reminded again that God's instalment of his king will prove an act of wrath and judgment against all who oppose him.

4. Responding to power (v 10-12)

The application comes in the last stanza of this poem. The command for earthly kings to 'be wise' and 'warned' extends to all. Serving the Lord in celebration of his rule is a key marker of the Christian life (note the themes of 'joy' and 'reverence' or 'fear' throughout 1 Peter). While being on the wrong side of King Jesus is a terrifying prospect (cf. Revelation 16), there is no better place to find true and lasting blessing than with him; for he alone is the source and centre of all true goodness, peace and order (cf. Colossians 1:15-20).

GETTING STARTED

1. Share a time you felt powerful. What was the situation and how did it make you feel?

OR,

2. 'True power is received, not the result of war or revolution.' Discuss.

In this psalm we will explore the true source and centre of power. Knowing this will enable us to respond when we see others try to assert whatever power they think they have in the world and our lives.

INTO THE TEXT

Read Psalm 2

3. Summarise this psalm with as few words as possible. What stands out to you?
4. Focus on v 1-3. Why are the conspiracies of the nations or the plotting of peoples 'in vain'?
5. Focus on v 4-6. Why do you think the instalment of God's king is an act of rebuke or wrath against other earthly rulers?
6. Focus on v 7-9. Restate the Lord's decree in your own words and share with the group.

7. Verses 10-12 form the application of this psalm. What verbs stand out to you and why?

8. This psalm gives us quite a stern picture of God and his king. What are the blessings we can expect that come from taking refuge in him? (see e.g. Psalms 1:1-3; 3:3-5, 8; 4:8; 5:7, 11-12)

9. The New Testament identifies Jesus as the One who is both God's Son and ruler over all. How do we know this is the case and what are the implications for us? (cf. Romans 1:3-4; Colossians 1:15-20)

TAKE AWAY

10. Refer back to Psalm 2:10-12. Which verbs (e.g. 'serve the Lord', 'celebrate his rule') are missing in your relationship with God? How might you implement these in your own life?

11. How might worshipping Jesus as King influence the way we respond to all other 'world leaders' and plays for power?