

BEFORE YOU PRAY: THE PRE-PRAYER PSALMS

Psalms 1-2

SOME OBSERVATIONS BEFORE OPENING TO PSALM ONE

Christians tend to love the Psalms . . . but perhaps not all of them.

Psalm 23, *“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...”*

Psalm 46 *“God is our refuge and strength...”*

Psalms 139 *“I have been fearfully and wonderfully made.”*

Imprecatory Psalms. Imprecatory means “to invoke a curse upon.”

Psalm 3:7 *“Arise, O Lord, save me, O God! For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked.”*

Psalm 69:23 *“May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever.
²⁴Pour out your wrath on them; let your fierce anger overtake them.”*

Psalm 137:9 *“Happy is the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.”*

WELCOME TO THE COUNTER-WORLD OF THE PSALMS

The Psalmists write as if they’ve become certain of something.

PSALMS 1 AND 2: TWO PILLARS FORMING THE GATEWAY INTO PRAYER

Pillar #1: Delighting In What God Has Done: The Torah-Teaching Of God

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; ²but his delight is in the law (Torah) of the Lord, and on his law he meditates (hagah) day and night.

The word Torah comes from a verb, “yarah”, which means to throw something, like a javelin, so that it hits its mark. The aim of God’s Torah is to hit us where we live.

Pillar #2: Placing Our Hope In The One To Come: The Messiah King

“Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot (hagah) in vain? ²The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed.”

The Hebrew word that dominates the action in Psalms 1 and 2 is, “hagah”, which is translated as “meditate” in Psalm 1, but as “plot” in Psalm 2. Hagah means “an absorbed, engrossed interest”

WE’RE TO ENTER INTO PRAYER WITH THANKSGIVING AND HOPE

Psalm 1 as Pillar #1: Delighting In What God Has Done: The Torah-Teaching Of God

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; ²but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. ³He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. ⁴The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. ⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; ⁶for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”

Psalm 2 as Pillar #2: Placing Our Hope In The One To Come: The Messiah King

“Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ²The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, ³“Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.”

⁴He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. ⁵Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, ⁶“As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.”

⁷I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. ⁸Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. ⁹You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.”

¹⁰Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. ¹¹Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. ¹²Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.”

Compare to Psalm 3:

O LORD, how many are my foes!

Many are rising against me;

² many are saying of my soul,

“There is no salvation for him in God.” Selah

*³ But you, O LORD, are a shield about me,
my glory, and the lifter of my head.*

*⁴ I cried aloud to the LORD,
and he answered me from his holy hill. Selah*

*⁵ I lay down and slept;
I woke again, for the LORD sustained me.*

*⁶ I will not be afraid of many thousands of people
who have set themselves against me all around.*

⁷ Arise, O LORD!

Save me, O my God!

*For you strike all my enemies on the cheek;
you break the teeth of the wicked.*

*⁸ Salvation belongs to the LORD;
your blessing be on your people! Selah*