



# Unlocking the Bible (26)



*Let the Redeemed of the Lord say so! –*

## *A review of the Book of Psalms*

Coming now to the Book of Psalms, we encounter a collection of songs or poems expressing varied spiritual experiences. Within the 'Book of Psalms' they are grouped into five distinct sections, or 'books', identified by the closing formula: Amen and Amen. In this review, we will examine the distinctive emphasis of each of these 'books' and suggest the significant of the progression and what it might teach us.

Book 1 (1-41) opens with a classic statement that 'the good' do well and 'the bad' do not. But in reality, that is not so (as Job illustrates), Life is a paradox, always causing questions to be asked. And, asking questions in perplexing situations characterises this section. No psalm expresses this clearer than Psalm 22 with those poignant words spoken by the Lord Jesus on the Cross: '*My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?*' But not all the experiences are so sad. Psalm 23 presents a different picture. The whole section echoes these paradoxes and confusions of experience; it is full of cries, of anguish and joy. It is where the experience of God starts.

The next section (42 – 72) is clearly defined by the summary statement at the end: *the prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended*. Crying has now progressed to praying. But, what's the difference? That can be seen in two features. The first is the frequent address to God, as opposed to the preoccupation with the 'I' and the 'me' of Section 1. Although generated in my condition, it is a directed plea to Someone Else. Prayer is not just cathartic relief, but a deliberate approach to One who can help. Secondly, there is unashamed requesting, asking God to save, deliver, rescue, and help. Prayer is concerned with answers, with action. It is our asking God to help.

The third section (73 – 89) again begins with the paradox of the apparently different fates of the 'good' and the 'bad', yet it does not stop there. Reflection in the Temple reveals that the real story is different: God does help His people. Tracing the Providence of God through history and the many examples of His deliverances confirms this. God does regard situations; He does hear prayer and He acts in a redemptive way.

No wonder, then, that the fourth 'Book' (90 – 106) comes out with a declaration: *the Lord reigns*. It is the assured outcome of an experience that started in the conflict of personal quandary, moved to positive action in prayer, radically changed when, becoming more caught up with God than with self, now expresses itself in this victorious declaration of faith.

That leads to the final 'Book' (107 – 150) and its clear emphasis on praise: *Let the redeemed of the Lord say so. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord*. It is the saying thank you aspect that follows deliverance.

The link between the different books forms a progression of experience. Starting '*just as I am*' in my confused state, bemoaning my situation I then '*turn my fears to prayers*'. That is, realising that solution and help will only come from a Higher Source I turn to God with definite petition, echoing the exhortation in Hebrews 11: 6 that "*they that come to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him*". Prayer takes me into God's presence and into a contemplation of His ways. That changes the scenario and leads to genuine gratitude, so wonderfully expressed in the old classic hymn:

*Praise my soul the King of heaven, to Thy feet thy tribute bring,  
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven; who like thee His praise should sing?*