

# “Let Every Thing That Hath Breath Praise the Lord”

## Lesson 25

### Psalms

*Old Testament Gospel Doctrine Teacher’s Manual, Published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Lesson 25, pp 117-122.*

**Purpose:** To help class members show their gratitude for the Savior and for the many blessings that he and our Heavenly Father have given us.

**Preparation:**

- Study the lesson and prayerfully select the scriptures, themes, and questions that best meet class members’ needs. This lesson does not cover the entire book of Psalms. Rather, it deals with a few of the important themes that are expressed throughout the book.
- If you use the first attention activity, bring a picture of the Savior and four or five items that represent things for which you are grateful, such as the scriptures, a picture of a loved one, an item that represents one of your talents, or an item of food. If you use the second attention activity, ask one or two class members to prepare to share a favorite psalm and tell why it is important to them.
- Bring one or more pictures of temples.

#### Attention Activity

1. Show a picture of the Savior and express your gratitude for his life and mission. Display the items that represent other things for which you are grateful. Express your gratitude for each one. Then ask the following questions:

- What gifts and opportunities from the Lord are you especially grateful for? How would your life be different without these blessings?

Explain that many of the psalms express gratitude for blessings the Lord has given. Part of this lesson focuses on those blessings and on what we can do to show our gratitude for them.

2. Ask a class member to read [Psalm 23](#) aloud. Then ask the following questions:

- What feelings are expressed in this psalm? What are your feelings as you read or listen to this psalm?

Ask one or two assigned class members to share a favorite psalm and tell why it is important to them.

#### Scripture Discussion and Application

Explain that the book of [Psalms](#) is a collection of poems originally sung as praises or petitions to God. Many were written by David. This book is like a hymnal from ancient Israel. Its lyrics constitute some of the world’s best inspirational literature, expressing faith in the Lord and an earnest desire to live righteously.

### 1. Prophecies of the life and mission of Jesus Christ

Many psalms prophesy of Christ’s mission as the Messiah. The resurrected Savior declared, “All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me” ([Luke 24:44](#)). Discuss the fulfillment of a few of the following prophecies about Christ that are written in the book of Psalms:

<i>Prophecy</i>	<i>Fulfillment</i>
<a href="#">Psalm 107:23–30</a>	<a href="#">Matthew 8:23–27</a> . Jesus calmed the winds and the waves.
<a href="#">Psalm 69:8</a>	<a href="#">John 1:11</a> ; <a href="#">John 7:5</a> . Jesus was not received by his own people.
<a href="#">Psalm 41:9</a> ; <a href="#">Psalm 55:12–14</a>	<a href="#">John 13:18</a> , <a href="#">John 13:21</a> . Jesus was betrayed by a friend.

<a href="#">Psalm 69:20</a>	<a href="#">Mark 14:32–41</a> . Jesus suffered alone in Gethsemane.
<a href="#">Psalm 22:7–8</a>	<a href="#">Matthew 27:39–43</a> . Jesus was mocked.
<a href="#">Psalm 22:16</a>	<a href="#">Mark 15:25</a> . Jesus was crucified.
<a href="#">Psalm 22:18</a>	<a href="#">Matthew 27:35</a> . The soldiers cast lots for Christ’s clothes.
<a href="#">Psalm 22:1</a>	<a href="#">Matthew 27:46</a> . Jesus asked the Father why he had forsaken him.
<a href="#">Psalm 69:21</a>	<a href="#">John 19:28–30</a> . Jesus was given vinegar for his thirst.
<a href="#">Psalm 34:20</a>	<a href="#">John 19:33–36</a> . None of Jesus’ bones was broken.
<a href="#">Psalm 31:5</a>	<a href="#">Luke 23:46</a> . Jesus commended his spirit to the Father and died.
<a href="#">Psalm 16:10</a>	<a href="#">Acts 2:31–32</a> ; <a href="#">Acts 13:34–35</a> . The Savior’s flesh did not see corruption, being raised up in the Resurrection.

• Jesus Christ is the only person whose birth, life, death, and resurrection were prophesied before his birth. Why do you think such detailed prophecies were given about the Savior’s life? (These prophecies made it clear that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the Savior of the world.) How were these prophecies a blessing to those who received them? (The prophecies helped people learn of the Savior and gain testimonies of him even before he was born [see [Mosiah 3:13](#)]. The prophecies also helped some people recognize him when he came.)

## 2. “The Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee” ([Psalm 116:7](#)).

In addition to prophesying of the Savior’s life and mission, many psalms express gratitude for blessings such as the creation of heaven and earth; the Savior’s mercy, forgiveness, and love; the scriptures; and the temple.

### *The Creation of Heaven and Earth*

Discuss the following psalms that express gratitude to the Lord for the creation of heaven and earth:

[Psalm 19:1](#)

[Psalm 104:5–7](#), [Psalm 104:14](#), [Psalm 104:24](#)

[Psalm 136:3–9](#)

• How does the creation of heaven and earth testify of God’s power and love? (See [Alma 30:44](#); [Moses 6:63](#).) How can we show gratitude for the gift of the Creation?

### *The Savior’s Mercy, Forgiveness, and Love*

Discuss some of the following psalms that express gratitude to the Savior for his mercy, forgiveness, and love:

[Psalm 23](#) (you may not need to discuss this psalm if you used it in the attention activity)

[Psalm 51](#) (you may not need to discuss this psalm if you discussed it in lesson 24)

[Psalm 59:16](#)

[Psalm 78:38](#)

[Psalm 86:5](#), [Psalm 86:13](#)

[Psalm 100:4–5](#)

[Psalm 103:2–4](#), [Psalm 103:8–11](#), [Psalm 103:17–18](#)

• What can we learn about the Lord from these psalms? Invite class members to tell how they have come to know of the Lord’s mercy, forgiveness, and love.

• What impresses you about David’s plea for forgiveness in [Psalm 51](#)? What does this psalm teach us about repentance and forgiveness? (Note the first words in

verses 2, 7, and 12. These words describe important aspects of repentance. Note also verse 17, which describes the condition of heart we must have to truly repent.)

### *The Scriptures*

Discuss the following psalms that express gratitude to the Lord for the scriptures:

#### [Psalm 19:7–11](#)

#### [Psalm 119](#)

- What words did David use in [Psalm 19:7–10](#) to describe the scriptures? (Synonyms for the scriptures include *law, testimony, statutes, commandment, and judgments*. Adjectives describing the scriptures include *perfect, sure, right, pure, true, and righteous*. The scriptures are also described as more desired than gold and sweeter than honey.)
- What blessings can the scriptures bring into our lives, as recorded in [Psalm 19:7–11](#)? You may want to list these blessings on the chalkboard:
  - a. They convert our souls (verse 7).
  - b. They make the simple wise (verse 7).
  - c. They cause our hearts to rejoice (verse 8).
  - d. They enlighten our eyes (verse 8).
  - e. They give us warning (verse 11).
- How have the scriptures blessed your life in these or in other ways?
- The Psalmist exclaimed to the Lord, “O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day” ([Psalm 119:97](#); see also verses 15–16, 33–35, 40, 47–50, 72, 92, 104, 174). How can we develop such a love for the scriptures?
- How are the scriptures like “a lamp unto [our] feet, and a light unto [our] path”? ([Psalm 119:105](#)).

### *The Temple*

Discuss some of the following psalms about the temple. You may want to display one or more pictures of temples as class members read these psalms:

#### [Psalm 5:7](#)

#### [Psalm 15:1–3](#)

#### [Psalm 24](#)

#### [Psalm 27:4](#)

#### [Psalm 65:4](#)

#### [Psalm 84:1–2](#), [Psalm 84:4](#), [Psalm 84:10–12](#)

#### [Psalm 122](#)

#### [Psalm 134](#)

- What can we learn about the temple from these psalms? What can we learn about preparing ourselves to go to the temple?

You may want to have class members sing or read the words to “We Love Thy House, O God” (*Hymns*, [no. 247](#)), or invite some Primary children to come to class and sing “I Love to See the Temple” (*Children’s Songbook*, [95](#)).

### **3. “What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?” ([Psalm 116:12](#))**

- In [Psalm 116:12](#), David asked, “What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?” How did David answer this question? You may want to list each of David’s statements as shown below:
  - a. “I will take the cup of salvation” ([Psalm 116:13](#)).
  - b. “I will ... call upon the name of the Lord” ([Psalm 116:13](#)).
  - c. “O Lord, truly I am thy servant” ([Psalm 116:16](#)).
  - d. “I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving” ([Psalm 116:17](#)).
  - e. “I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the Lord’s house” ([Psalm 116:18–19](#)).
- How can we apply David’s answers in showing gratitude to the Lord?

#### 4. “Trust in the Lord” ([Psalm 4:5](#))

• “Trust in the Lord” is one of the most common admonitions in the book of Psalms ([Psalm 4:5](#); [Psalm 5:11](#); [Psalm 9:10](#); [Psalm 18:2](#); [Psalm 56:11](#); [Psalm 62:8](#); [Psalm 118:8–9](#)). How do we place our trust in the Lord? How have you been blessed as you have trusted him?

##### Conclusion:

The psalms bear powerful witness of the divine mission of Jesus Christ. They also remind us of the great blessings that he and our Heavenly Father have given us. And they suggest ways we can express gratitude for those blessings.

You may want to invite class members to read the final Psalm ([Psalm 150](#)) to summarize the message of the book of Psalms. Add your own testimony of praise and thanksgiving.

##### Additional Teaching Ideas:

###### 1. Latter-day hymns inspired by Old Testament psalms

Explain that the hymnbook could be viewed as our latter-day equivalent of the psalms. You may want to have class members sing a latter-day hymn that was inspired by an Old Testament psalm. Some of these hymns are “The Lord Is My Shepherd” (*Hymns*, [no. 108](#); [Psalm 23](#)), “The Lord Is My Light” (*Hymns*, [no. 89](#); [Psalm 27:1](#)), “How Great Thou Art” (*Hymns*, [no. 86](#); [Psalm 8:3–9](#); [Psalm 9:1–2](#)), and “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty” (*Hymns*, [no. 72](#); [Psalm 23:6](#); [Psalm 150](#)).

###### 2. Blessings of singing hymns

• What are some of the main topics of our latter-day hymns? (Answers may include the Savior, our duties as Church members, enduring to the end, faith, home and family, love, missionary work, prayer, priesthood, prophets, the restoration of the gospel, the sacrament, service, enduring trials, and Zion.) How does singing hymns bless us? (See [D&C 25:12](#).)

Discuss some of the following ways that singing hymns can bless us:

a. Hymns lift our spirits.

b. Hymns inspire us to live more righteously.

c. Hymns remind us of our blessings.

d. Hymns give us an opportunity to sing praises to the Lord.

e. Hymns give us a way to bear testimony.

f. Hymns help us recommit ourselves to the Lord.

g. Hymns help us feel the Spirit.

h. Hymns help us be more in tune with our Heavenly Father.

i. Hymns help us learn and teach the gospel.

The First Presidency said:

“Inspirational music is an essential part of our church meetings. The hymns invite the Spirit of the Lord, create a feeling of reverence, unify us as members, and provide a way for us to offer praises to the Lord.

“Some of the greatest sermons are preached by the singing of hymns. Hymns move us to repentance and good works, build testimony and faith, comfort the weary, console the mourning, and inspire us to endure to the end” (*Hymns*, [ix](#)).

• Several psalms speak of singing as making a “joyful noise unto the Lord” ([Psalm 98:4](#); [Psalm 100:1](#); see also [Psalm 66:1](#); [Psalm 95:1–2](#)). How can we make better use of hymn singing in our Church meetings and homes, ensuring that it is joyful and meaningful?

• At the Last Supper, Jesus and his Apostles sang a hymn ([Matthew 26:30](#)). How do you think singing a hymn helped Jesus and his Apostles prepare to fulfill the work that was before them?

• Just before the Prophet Joseph Smith was martyred in Carthage Jail, he asked John Taylor to sing “A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief” (*Hymns*, [no. 29](#); see also B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church*, 2:282–84). How do you think the singing of this hymn helped the Prophet?

### 3. Poetic parallelism in the psalms

Your study of the psalms may be enriched by an understanding of the poetic techniques that David and other Hebrew poets used. One of these techniques is parallelism. One common characteristic of parallelism is the repetition of a thought in different words. Such repetition expands or intensifies the meaning of an idea. One example of this kind of parallelism is [Psalm 102:1–2](#), in which the same thought is expressed in different words five times (“hear my prayer,” “let my cry come unto thee,” “hide not thy face from me,” “incline thine ear unto me,” and “in the day when I call answer me speedily”). Point out how repetition intensifies the message.

*Old Testament Student Manual Genesis-2 Samuel, Religion 301,  
Published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,  
Chapter 28, pp 309-315.*

## The Psalms: Songs from the Heart of Israel

### Lesson 28

#### (28-1) Introduction

“Music is part of the language of the Gods. It has been given to man so he can sing praises to the Lord. It is a means of expressing, with poetic words and in melodious tunes, the deep feelings of rejoicing and thanksgiving found in the hearts of those who have testimonies of the divine Sonship and who know of the wonders and glories wrought for them by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Music is both in the voice and in the heart. Every true saint finds his heart full of songs of praise to his Maker. Those whose voices can sing forth the praises found in their hearts are twice blest. ‘Be filled with the Spirit,’ Paul counseled, ‘Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.’ (Eph. 5:18–19.) Also: ‘Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.’ (Col. 3:16.)

“Unfortunately not all music is good and edifying. Lucifer uses much that goes by the name of music to lead people to that which does not edify and is not of God. Just as language can be used to bless or curse, so music is a means of singing praises to the Lord or of planting evil thoughts and desires in the minds of men. Of that music which meets the divine standard and has the Lord’s approval, he says: ‘My soul delighteth in the song of the heart; yea, the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads.’ (D&C 25:12.)

“In view of all that the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us, ought we not to sing praises to his holy name forever?” (McConkie, *The Promised Messiah*, p. 553.)

The psalms in Hebrew are called *Tehillim*, a word coming from the Hebrew word *halal*, “to praise” (Clarke, *Bible Commentary*, 3:199). The same root forms the word *hallelujah*, meaning “praise to Yah” (Jehovah). Unlike some modern songs that tend to depress the spirit, the psalms have the power to lift one toward God.

The psalms are a collection of some of the very finest of the world’s inspirational literature.

**NOTES AND COMMENTARY ON PSALMS**

**(28-2) The Psalms**

Anciently the Jews divided the Old Testament into three main sections: the Law (the first five books of Moses), the Prophets, and the Writings. The Psalms constituted the major portion of the third division.

The Hebrew name for Psalms was *Tehillim*, or songs of praise. Our title comes from the Greek psalterion, which is formed from the root *psallo*, meaning “to sing” (Clarke, *Bible Commentary*, 3:199).

Anciently the Hebrews divided the one hundred and fifty psalms into five separate books that included, in today’s Bible, Psalms 1 through 41, 42 through 72, 73 through 89, 90 through 106, and 107 through 150. At the end of each division, the break is marked with a doxology, or formal declaration of God’s power and glory (see Psalms 41:13; 72:19; 89:52; 106:48). Psalm 150 is itself a doxology, using the Hebrew *Hallelujah*, “praise ye the Lord,” at its beginning and end, as well as the word *praise* eleven other times. It is a fitting conclusion to the *Tehillim*, “songs of praise.”

**(28-3) Who Wrote the Psalms?**

There is a great debate among biblical scholars about the authorship of the Psalms. Superscriptions on many of the Psalms themselves attribute them to various ancient authors:

Psalms with no superscription .....	18
Psalms attributed to David .....	70
Psalms attributed to Solomon .....	2
Psalms attributed to Asaph (a musician in David’s court) .....	12
Psalms attributed to the sons of Korah (Levites) .....	10
Psalms attributed to Heman (a leader of the temple music).....	1
Psalms attributed to Ethan (a leader of the temple music).....	1
Psalms attributed to Moses .....	1
Psalms with song titles.....	4
Hallelujah (“Praise Ye Jehovah”) Psalms .....	18

Psalms of Degree (see Reading 28-4 for a definition)..... 13

“Although modern critics . . . customarily deny the Davidic authorship of the Psalms, there is ample internal evidence that David, the great poet and musician of Israel, was the principal author of the Psalter. This position, despite the contention of negative criticism, is indicated by the following reasons:

(1) David’s name is famous in the O. T. period for music and song and is closely associated with holy liturgy (II Sam. 6:5–15; I Chron. 16:4; II Chron. 7:6; 29:30).

(2) David was especially endowed by the Holy Spirit (I Sam. 23:1, 2; Mark 12:36; Acts 2:25–31; 4:25, 26).

(3) David’s music and poetical gifts appear indelibly interwoven on the pages of O. T. history. He is called ‘the sweet psalmist of Israel’ (II Sam. 23:1). He was a skilled performer on the lyre (I Sam. 16:16–18). He was the author of the masterful elegy written upon the death of Saul and Jonathan (II Sam. 1:19–27). He is referred to as a model poetmusician by the prophet Amos (Amos 6:5).

(4) Much internal evidence in the psalms themselves point to David’s authorship. Most of the songs attributed to him reflect some period of his life, such as Psa. 23, 51 and 57. In line with this evidence of Scripture, a number of the psalms indicate Davidic authorship.

(5) Certain psalms are cited as Davidic in Scripture in general. Acts 4:25, 26 so cites Psalm 2. Acts 2:25–28 so cites Psalm 16. Romans 4:6–8 cites Psalm 32. Acts 1:16–20 thus refers to Psalm 69. Also, Rom. 11:9, 10. [See also] Acts 1:20 with Psalm 109; Matt. 22:44; Mark 12:36, 37; Luke 20:42–44; Acts 2:34 with Psalm 110.” (Unger, *Bible Dictionary*, s.v., “Psalms,” pp. 898–99.)

**(28-4) What Is the Significance of the Unusual Words Found As Subtitles throughout the Psalms?**

In addition to the superscription indicating the author of the psalm, there are often instructions which contain words transliterated from the Hebrew and left untranslated. Generally, they seem to have been specific instructions to the singer or the musicians, or to have served as a note about the nature of the particular song.

“Of the terms left *untranslated* or *obscure* in our Bible, it may be well to offer some explanation in this place, taking them in alphabetical order for the sake of convenience. . . . “

(1) *Aijeleth Shahar*, *Hind of the Morning*, i.e. the sun, or the dawn of day. This

occurs only in [Psalm 22], where we may best take it to designate a song, perhaps commencing with these words, or bearing this name, to the melody of which the psalm was to be sung. . . . “

(2) *Alamoth* [Psalm 46], probably signifies *virgins*, and hence denotes music for female voices, or the *treble*. . . . “

(3) *Al-taschith, Destroy Thou Not*, is found over [Psalms 57–59, 75], and signifies, by general consent, some well-known ode beginning with the expression [compare Isaiah 65:8], to the tune of which these compositions were to be sung. “

(4) *Degrees* appears over fifteen Psalms [120–34], called *Songs of Degrees*, and has been explained in various ways, of which the following are the chief.

(a) The ancients understood by it *stairs* or *steps*, . . . and in accordance with this, Jewish writers relate . . . that these Psalms were *sung on fifteen steps*, leading from the court of Israel to the court of the women. This explanation is now exploded. . . .

(b) Luther, whom Tholuck is inclined to follow, renders the title *a song in the higher choir*, supposing the Psalms to have been sung from an elevated place or ascent, or with elevated voice.

(c) Gesenius, Delitzsch and De Wette think the name refers to a peculiar rhythm in these songs, by which the sense advances by *degrees*, and so *ascends* from clause to clause.

(d) According to the most prevalent and probable opinion, the title signifies *song of the ascents*, or *pilgrim song*, meaning a song composed for, or sung during the journeying of the people up to Jerusalem, whether as they returned from Babylon, or as they stately repaired to the national solemnities. . . . Journeys to Jerusalem are generally spoken of as *ascents*, on account of the elevated situation of the city and temple [see Ezra 7:9; Psalm 122:4]. This explanation of the name is favored by the brevity and the contents of these songs. “

(5) *Gittith* appears over [Psalms 8, 81, 84], and is of very uncertain meaning, though not improbably it signifies an instrument or tune brought from the city of *Gath*. . . . “

(6) *Higgaion* is found over [Psalm 9:16], and probably means either *musical sound*, according to the opinion of most, . . . or *meditation* according to Tholuck and Hengstenberg. “

(7) *Jeduthun* is found over [Psalms 39, 62, 67], and is generally taken for the name of choristers descended from Jeduthun, of whom we read in [1 Chronicles 25:1, 3], as one of David’s three chief musicians or leaders of the Temple music. This use of the name Jeduthun for Jeduthunites is perhaps like the well-known use of Israel for the Israelites. It is most probable that in [Psalm 39] Jeduthun himself is meant, and not his family. The Psalm may have been set to music by Jeduthun or set to a theme named for him. . . . “

(8) *Jonath-elem-rechokim, the silent dove of them that are afar*, or perhaps *the dove of the distant terebinth*, found only over [Psalm 56], may well denote the name or commencement of an ode to the air of which this psalm was sung. “

(9) *Leannoth* in the title of [Psalm 88] is quite obscure. It is probably the name of a tune. “

(10) *Mahalath* occurs in [Psalms 53 and 88], and denotes, according to some, a sort of *flute*. . . . Upon *Mahalath Leannoth* [Psalm 88] is perhaps a direction to chant it to the instrument or tune called *mahalath*. “

(11) *Maschil* is found in the title of thirteen psalms. Delitzsch supposes it to mean a meditation. According to Gesenius, De Wette, Ewald, and others, it means a *poem*, so called either for its *skillful* composition or for its *wise and pious* strain. The common interpretation makes it a *didactic poem*, . . . to teach or make wise. “

(12) *Michtam* is prefixed to [Psalms 16, 56–60], and is subject to many conjectures. Many, after Aben Ezra, derive it from the Hebrew word meaning *gold*, and understand a *golden psalm*, so called probably on account of its *excellence*. . . . “

(13) *Muth-labben* [Psalm 9] presents a perfect riddle, owing to the various readings of MSS., and the contradictory conjectures of the learned. Besides the common reading *upon death to the son*, we have the same word that is used in [Psalm 46] (see above *Alamoth*). Some explain it as the *subject* or *occasion* of the song, but most refer it to the music (“*set to Muthlabben*” *R.V.*). Gesenius, in his last edition, renders it—with *virgins’ voice for the boys, i.e.*, to be sung by a choir of boys in the *treble*. “

(14) *Neginoth* [Psalm 4; 61]. . . . This name, from the Hebrew word meaning to *strike* a chord, . . . clearly denotes that the Psalm was to be sung to the accompaniment of *stringed instruments*. “

(15) *Nehiloth* [Psalm 5], comes most likely from the Hebrew word meaning to *perforate*, and denotes *pipes* or *flutes*. “

(16) *Selah* is found seventy-three times in the psalms, generally at the end of a sentence or paragraph; but in [Psalms 50:19 and 57:3] it stands in the middle of the verse. . . . most authors have agreed in considering this word as somehow relating to the *music*. . . . Probably *selah* was used to direct the singer to be silent, or to pause a little, while the instruments played an interlude or symphony. In [Psalm 9:16] it occurs in the expression *higgaion selah*, which Gesenius, with much probability, renders *instrumental music, pause, i.e. let the instruments strike up a symphony, and let the singer pause*. “

(17) *Sheminith* [Psalms 6 and 7] means properly *eighth*, and denotes either, as some think, an instrument with *eight* chords, or, more likely, music in the lower notes, or *bass*. This is strongly favored by [1 Chronicles 15:20–21], where the terms *alamoth* and *sheminith* clearly denote different *parts* of music: the former answering to our *treble*, and the latter to the *bass*, an *octave* below. “

(18) *Shiggaion* [Psalm 7], denotes, according to Gesenius and Furst, a *song* or *hymn*; but Ewald and Hengstenberg derive it from a Hebrew word meaning *to err* or *wander*; and hence the former understands *a song uttered in the greatest excitement*, the latter *after the manner of dithyrambs, or to dithyrambic measures*. “

(19) *Shushan* [Psalm 60] and in plural *shoshannim* [Psalms 45, 69, 80]. This word commonly signifies *lily*, and probably denotes either an instrument bearing some resemblance to a lily (perhaps *cymbal*), or more probably a melody so named. *Eduth* is joined to it in [Psalms 60 and 80], giving the sense *lily of testimony*, the name of a tune.” (Fallows, *Bible Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Psalms,” 3:1406–7.)

In addition to these headings, Psalm 119 is divided into twenty-two sections corresponding to the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Each section is titled with the corresponding name of the Hebrew letter and its English transliteration. This designation shows that in the Hebrew the psalm forms an acrostic. (An *acrostic* is a poem or work of prose in which the initial letter of each line forms its own word or a particular pattern.) In Psalm 119 each of the twenty-two sections has eight lines. Every line in each section begins with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In other words, verses 1–8 all start in the original with *aleph*, verses 9–16 with *beth*, and so on. In an age when literature was often memorized and transmitted orally, such devices were a valuable aid to memory. Psalms 25 and 34 also form acrostics with each new line beginning with a successive letter, but this design is not evident in the English translation.

#### **(28-5) How Does One Explain the Self-Justification and the Calls for Judgments Found in Certain Psalms?**

“Christians reading the psalms are bound to come across two special problem areas. One is the self-justification of the psalmists. The other is their tendency to call down and spell out the most terrible vengeance. We cannot simply discard the offending passages. They are part of God’s word, alongside passages no one would question. Nor will it do to excuse the psalmists on the grounds that they did not possess the teaching of Christ. Because they did possess the law. They knew as well as we do that no man is perfect by God’s standards; and they were taught to behave in a loving way to others (Leviticus 19:17–18), even their enemies (Exodus 23:4–5). The law did not license retaliation, it set limits to it (an eye for an eye, *and no more*). “

*Self-justification*. Two comments may help. First, the psalmist is claiming comparative, not absolute righteousness (i.e. in comparison with other people, not measured by God’s standards). ‘A good man may sin and yet be a good man.’ There is all the difference in the world between those who endeavour to do right and those who deliberately set aside the common laws of God and society. David, in particular, was well aware of his shortcomings before God (see Psalms 51 and 19:11–13). Deep repentance features alongside self-justification in the psalms.

“Second, the psalmist is very often picturing himself as ‘the indignant plaintiff’ putting his case before God the Judge. And, however much we dislike his self-righteous tone, from this point of view he is unquestionably ‘in the right’. “

*Cursing and vengeance*. Before we rush to condemn these passages as utterly ‘unchristian’, there are a few points worth bearing in mind.

“The first concerns God’s holiness. In emphasizing God’s love we tend today to be over-sentimental about rank evil. But the psalmists knew God as One ‘whose eyes are too pure to look upon evil’, who cannot countenance wrongdoing. And this is what motivates their call for vengeance on the wicked. God’s own character—his good name—demands it.

“Second, the psalmists are realistic in recognizing that right *cannot* triumph without the actual overthrow of evil and punishment of wrong. We pray ‘Thy kingdom come’. But we are often horrified when the psalmists spell out what this means—perhaps because we are less in love with good, less opposed to evil than they were; or because many of us have never known real persecution for our faith; or because we value life more than right.

“However, if the psalmists are guilty of actually gloating over the fate of the wicked, if personal vindictiveness creeps in under the cloak of concern for God’s good name, we are right to condemn it— and beware. We can ourselves so easily be guilty of the same thing. But in the psalmist’s case the wrong thinking (if wrong



thinking there is) never carries over into wrong action. There is no question of him taking the law into his own hands. . . . Vengeance is always seen as God's province, and his alone." (Alexander and Alexander, *Eerdmans' Handbook to the Bible*, p. 339.)

### **(28-6) The Poetry of the Psalms Compared with Other Classical Poetry**

"The *Hebrew Psalter* is the most ancient collection of poems in the world; and was composed long before those in which ancient Greece and Rome have gloried. Among all the *heathen* nations *Greece* had the honour of producing not only the *first*, but also the most sublime, of poets: but the subjects on which they employed their talents had, in general, but little tendency to meliorate the moral condition of men. Their subjects were either a *fabulous theology*, a *false and ridiculous religion*, *chimerical wars*, *absurd heroism*, *impure love*, *agriculture*, *national sports*, or *hymns in honour of gods* more corrupt than the most profligate of men. Their writings served only to render vice amiable, to honour superstition, to favour the most dangerous and most degrading passions of men, such as impure love, ambition, pride, and impiety. What is said of the *Greek poets* may be spoken with equal truth of their successors and imitators, the *Latin poets*; out of the whole of whose writings it would be difficult to extract even the *common maxims* of a *decent morality*. . . . The Hebrew poets, on the contrary, justly boast the highest antiquity: they were men inspired of God, holy in their lives, pure in their hearts, labouring for the good of mankind; proclaiming by their incomparable compositions the infinite perfections, attributes, and unity of the Divine nature; laying down and illustrating the purest rules of the most refined morality, and the most exalted piety. God, his attributes, his works, and the religion which he has given to man, were the grand subjects of their Divinely inspired muse. By their wonderful art, they not only embellished the history of their own people, because connected intimately with the history of God's providence, but they also, by the light of the Spirit of God that was within them, foretold future events of the most unlikely occurrence, at the distance of many hundreds of years, with such exact circumstantiality as has been the wonder and astonishment of considerate minds in all succeeding generations; a fact which, taken in its connection with the holiness and sublimity of their doctrine; the grandeur, boldness, and truth of their imagery; demonstrates minds under the immediate inspiration of that God whose nature is ineffable, who exists in all points of time, and whose wisdom is infinite." (Clarke, *Bible Commentary*, 3:208.)

### **(28-7) The Messianic Nature of the Psalms**

"Although the Psalter is largely composed of devotional hymns, heartfelt praise and personal testimonies of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord, yet many of these poetic gems give far-reaching predictions and are prophetic as well as devotionally

didactic. Psalm 2 is a magnificent prophetic panorama of Messiah's redemptive career and His return as King of Kings. Psalm 22 is an amazingly detailed prophecy of the suffering and death of Christ in His first advent. Psalm 110 is a far-reaching prophecy of Christ as a perpetual Priest. Psalm 16 heralds His future resurrection; Psalm 72 envisions the coming millennial kingdom. Psalm 45 brings into view a vast prophetic perspective. In all the O. T. there is no more practical, instructive, beautiful or popular book than the Psalms." (Unger, *Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Psalms," p. 899.)

Another scholar stated it this way:

"The primary meaning of the psalms is always to be sought first of all in their immediate, historical context. But this does not exhaust their significance. No one can read the psalms without becoming aware that certain psalms and individual verses have a deeper, future significance beyond the simple meaning of the words. The Messiah is not mentioned by name, but his figure is foreshadowed, as later generations of Jews came to realize. And the New Testament writers are quick to apply these verses to Jesus as the prophesied Messiah.

"Some psalms, particularly the 'royal psalms' (of which 2, 72, 110 are the most striking) picture an ideal divine king priest judge never fully realized in any actual king of Israel. Only the Messiah combines these roles in the endless, universal reign of peace and justice envisaged by the psalmists.

"Other psalms depict human suffering in terms which seem far-fetched in relation to ordinary experience, but which proved an extraordinarily accurate description of the actual sufferings of Christ. Under God's inspiration, the psalmists chose words and pictures which were to take on a significance they can hardly have dreamed of. Psalm 22, the psalm Jesus quoted as he hung on the cross (verse 1, Matthew 27:46), is the most amazing example." (Alexander and Alexander, *Eerdmans' Handbook to the Bible*, p. 329.)

Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained in detail some remarkably prophetic utterances:

"'All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me,' the risen Lord said to the assembled saints in the upper room. (Luke 24:44.) To Cleopas and another disciple, on the Emmaus road, the resurrected Jesus said: 'O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.' (Luke 24:25-27.) Surely those things we shall now quote from the Psalms—pointed, express, detailed

utterances about his sufferings, death, and atoning sacrifice—were included in those things which he expounded unto them.

“The Holy Ghost, through David, said: ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ (Ps. 22:1)—thus revealing aforetime the very words Jesus would speak on the cross in that moment when, left alone that he might drink the dregs of the bitter cup to the full, the Father would entirely withdraw his sustaining power. And so Matthew records: ‘And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, la ma sabach tha ni? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ (Matt. 27:46.)

“The same Psalm says: ‘All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.’ (Ps. 27:7–8.) The fulfillment, as Jesus hung on the cross, is found in these words: ‘The chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, he saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.’ (Matt. 27:41–44.)

“Next the Psalmist speaks of our Lord’s birth, of his reliance on God, of his troubles, and then coming back to the mob at the foot of the cross, he says: ‘They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion.’ Then the record says: ‘I am poured out like water’ (Ps. 22:9–14), an expression akin to Isaiah’s that ‘he hath poured out his soul unto death’ (Isa. 53:12).

“‘Thou hast brought me into the dust of death,’ the Psalmist continues, ‘For dogs have compassed me, the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet,’ which is exactly what transpired on the gloomy day of crucifixion. Then this: ‘They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture’ (Ps. 22:15–18), of which prediction Matthew says, ‘And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots’ (Matt. 27:35). John gives this more extended account of the fulfillment of this promise: ‘Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did.’ (John 19:23–24.)

“After this the Psalmist has the Messiah say, in words applicable to his Father, ‘I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee,’ a course that our Lord pursued with diligence during his whole ministry. And then this counsel: ‘Ye that fear the Lord, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel.’ Following this is the promise that the Lord shall be praised ‘in the great congregation,’ and that ‘all the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. For the kingdom is the Lord’s: and he is the governor of the nations.’ Clearly this has reference to the final millennial triumph of truth, a triumph that is to be when the gospel brought by the Messiah is restored again and carried according to his will to all men. Finally, in this Psalm, it is of the Messiah that the account speaks in these words: ‘A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation’; that is, the Seed of David, generated by the Father, shall serve in righteousness, with this result: ‘They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this.’ (Ps. 22:22–31.) And in harmony with this prophetic assurance, we now declare unto all people born after Messiah’s day, the righteousness of the Father in sending his Son and the righteousness of the Son in doing all things for men that needed to be done to bring to them both immortality and eternal life.

“Other Psalms also revealed, before the events, additional specifics that would attend or be associated with the cross of Christ and the agonizing death he would suffer thereon. With reference to the conniving and conspiring plots incident to our Lord’s arrest and judicial trials the prophecy was: ‘They took counsel together against me, they devised to take away my life.’ (Ps. 31:13.) As to the role of Judas in those conspiracies, the Psalmist says: ‘Mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me.’ (Ps. 41:9.) On that occasion when he washed their feet, Jesus spoke in laudatory terms of the twelve, but, said he, ‘I speak not of you all,’ for a moment later he was to say, ‘one of you shall betray me.’ ‘I know whom I have chosen,’ he continued, ‘but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me. Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he.’ After a few more words, he dipped the sop and gave it to Judas, thus identifying the traitor in their midst. (John 13:18–30.)

“‘The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up,’ is the Messianic word which foretold the driving of the money changers from the temple and caused Jesus to say, ‘Make not my Father’s house an house of merchandise,’ and which caused his disciples to remember the words of the Psalm. (John 2:13–17.) But the full Messianic statement, which forecasts more than the cleansing of the then-polluted temple, says: ‘The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me. . . . Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, and there was none; and for

comforters, but I found none.’ (Ps. 69:9, 20.) Who can fail to see in these words our Lord’s piteous state as, hailed before the rulers of this world, he found none to comfort him, but instead was reproached for testifying of that Father whom his Jewish persecutors had rejected?

“After these words comes the Psalmic declaration: ‘They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.’ (Ps. 69:21.) Their fulfillment is noted by Matthew in these words: ‘They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink. And they crucified him.’ Also: After Jesus had, as they supposed, called for Elias, the account says: ‘And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink.’ (Matt. 27:34–35, 47–48.) John’s account of this same occurrence ties the act at the crucifixion in with David’s prediction by recounting: ‘Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.’ It is as though advisedly and with deliberation, though he was in agony beyond compare, yet he consciously continued to the last moment of mortal life, with the avowed purpose of fulfilling all of the Messianic utterances concerning his mortal Messiahship. ‘Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar,’ John’s account continues, ‘and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.’ (John 19:28–30.)

“Viewing in advance, as it were, this last awesome moment of the Messiah’s mortal life, David wrote: ‘Into thine hand I commit my spirit.’ (Ps. 31:5.) Recording after the fact what took place as the last breath of mortal air filled the lungs of the Man on the cross, Luke said: ‘And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.’ (Luke 23:46.)

“With our Lord’s last breath, all things were fulfilled which pertained to that period when the breath of life sustained his life and being.” (*The Promised Messiah*, pp. 530–34.)

## POINTS TO PONDER

### (28-8)

Of the fifteen psalms you selected to study (see Instructions to the Student, no. 3), choose one (or two, if they are both short) and write your own Notes and Commentary on that psalm. Use the Bible Dictionary, the Topical Guide, and the footnotes in the text to help you in this project.

### (28-9)

The book of Psalms is quoted more often by New Testament writers than any other Old Testament book—over 115 times. Examine the following list of places in the New Testament where the psalms are quoted. How did the writers use the psalms? What can you conclude from the way they quote them? Do you get further insight into the psalm by how it was used?

Matthew 5:35	Psalm 48:2
Matthew 8:26	Psalm 107:28–29
Matthew 21:9; 23:39	Psalm 118:26
Matthew 21:16	Psalm 8:2
Matthew 21:42	Psalm 118:22–23
Matthew 22:42–45	Psalm 110:1
Matthew 26:23	Psalm 41:9
Mark 15:24–25	Psalm 22:14–18
Luke 4:10–11	Psalm 91:11–12
John 2:17	Psalm 69:9
John 6:31	Psalm 78:24
John 10:34	Psalm 82:6
Acts 1:20	Psalms 69:25; 109:8
Acts 2:27–32	Psalm 16:8–11
Acts 4:25–26	Psalm 2:1–2
Romans 3:4–18	Psalms 51:4; 14:1–3; 5:9; 140:3; 10:7; 36:1
1 Corinthians 10:26	Psalm 24:1
Ephesians 4:8	Psalm 68:18
Hebrews 1:7–13	Psalms 104:4; 45:6–7; 102:25–27; 110:1
Hebrews 5:5	Psalm 2:7
Hebrews 10:7	Psalm 40:6–8
1 Peter 2:7	Psalm 118:22

### (28-10)

In the October 1973 general conference Elder Bruce R. McConkie said:

“I think the Lord’s people should rejoice in him and shout praises to his holy name. Cries of hosannah should ascend from our lips continually. When I think of the revealed knowledge we have about him whom it is life eternal to know, and of the great plan of salvation which he ordained for us; when I think about his Beloved Son, who bought us with his blood, and who brought life and immortality to light through his atoning sacrifice; when I think of the life and ministry of the Prophet Joseph Smith, who has done more save Jesus only for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man who ever lived in it, and who crowned his mortal

ministry with a martyr's death—my soul wells up with eternal gratitude and I desire to raise my voice with the choirs above in ceaseless praise to him who dwells on high.

“When I think that the Lord has a living oracle guiding his earthly kingdom, and that there are apostles and prophets who walk the earth again; when I think that the Lord has given us the gift and power of the Holy Ghost so that we have the revelations of heaven and the power to sanctify our souls; when I think of the unnumbered blessings—the gifts, the miracles, the promise that the family unit shall go on everlastingly, all the blessings that are poured out upon us, and offered freely to all men everywhere—my desire to praise the Lord and proclaim his goodness and grace knows no bounds. And so in this spirit of praise and thanksgiving, which is the same spirit that attended the expressions made by President Romney this morning, I shall conclude with these words of my own psalm:

*Praise ye the Lord:  
Praise him for his goodness;  
Praise him for his grace;  
Exalt his name and seek his face—  
O praise ye the Lord.*

*Blessed is the Lord:  
Bless him for his mercy;  
Bless him for his love;  
Exalt his name and seek his face—  
O blessed is the Lord. Praise ye the Lord:*

*Praise him who all things did create;  
Praise him who all things did redeem;  
Exalt his name and seek his face—  
O praise ye the Lord.*

*Seek ye the Lord:  
Seek him who rules on high;  
Seek him whose will we know;  
Exalt his name and seek his face—  
O seek ye the Lord.”*

(In Conference Report, Oct. 1973, p. 57; or *Ensign*, Jan. 1974, p. 48.)

In the spirit of that counsel, write a psalm (a song of praise) of your own. You may wish to try to incorporate some of the elements of Hebrew parallelism (see Reading G-3), or just write a simple hymn of praise to the Lord.

## Teaching—at Home and Church

# Modern Saints and Modern Psalms: A Teaching Experience

*Georgia D. Gant Kieft, “Modern Saints and Modern Psalms: A Teaching Experience,” Ensign, Apr. 1979, 19*

The lesson for my Gospel Doctrine class was on the psalms. I had read all one hundred and fifty psalms in the Bible, as well as some written by Joseph Smith, Nephi, and others, during the week before my class. But the further I went, the more inadequate I felt as a literary teacher. How could I help the class feel the power and beauty of this type of literature—its capacity to stimulate self-improvement and love of God? I wanted to somehow help them see that the psalms could be an inspiration for a better life.

After studying all week, I began to feel more confident about my preparation.

Sunday morning I gathered up my Bible and lesson manual and was on my way out the door, when I got the feeling that I should take a pad of paper with me so the class could write a personal psalm during class time. The thought caught me off guard. *My class write a personal psalm as a class activity? What would the class members think? But I couldn't dismiss the idea—because another one presented itself: take extra pencils with the pad.*

I was getting a little impatient. Here I was trying to get to prayer meeting on time, and these thoughts kept coming into my head, causing me to do unnecessary things. I grabbed some pencils from the drawer, gathered up my books and my purse, and hurried to the car. But as I drove the twelve miles to church, I still felt uneasy—like I was not fully prepared—and I berated myself for not having a firm outline of my presentation in mind as I usually did.

In the church parking lot I remembered the pad of paper I had intended to bring. “Oh well,” I rationalized as I walked toward the building, “I didn't plan to use it anyway.”

But by the time I reached the door of the meetinghouse, I knew I needed the paper. I went directly to the library, but the librarian hadn't arrived yet, and I couldn't find anyone with a key to the library. Fortunately, the ward Primary president offered to get me paper from her supplies.

During the prayer meeting I still worried about how to approach the psalm assignment. Would the class be critical? Would they participate?

Opening exercises were over all too soon, and I was standing before an unusually large class, plus several new faces—still without a complete lesson outline in my head. Taking a deep breath, I began: I greeted the class, wrote the word *psalms* on the chalkboard, then defined it and shared my feelings about the beauty of this form of expression. I spoke of David's great psalms, and one brother read the twenty-third psalm for the class. Other class members then read portions of other psalms.

I glanced at the clock. About ten minutes of class time had expired.

Almost without realizing it, I turned to the chalkboard again and wrote *thanksgiving*. Then, somewhat hesitantly, I announced that I wanted each person to write a psalm of thanksgiving on the paper I would pass out. They would have five minutes to write, I told them, and then if any wanted to share their psalms with the class, we would listen. To my surprise, everyone took the paper eagerly.

I sat down, letting the class ponder quietly, and glanced again at the clock. Thirty minutes of class time remained.

“What if nobody wants to share his psalm?” I worried. “Maybe they'll all be too embarrassed with their first attempt at psalm-writing.”

But a reverent feeling came over me as I glanced at the class. Deep in thought, they were all busily writing down praises of thanks to God. Only then did I realize that I had not prepared the activity from my own wisdom and judgment, but that it had come by the prompting of the Holy Ghost.

When the five minutes were up, for the first time that day I stood confidently before the class—knowing the complete order of presentation that was to follow. After sharing with the class the great feeling of reverence I had felt from them as they wrote, I asked if anyone wanted to read his psalm aloud. Many did. As they read, the feeling which settled over the group lifted our spirits and confirmed once again to me that the assignment had been an inspired one.

Although these hurriedly written psalms (five minutes doesn't allow much polishing!) may not compete with the great psalms recorded in scripture, they became personal scripture to those who wrote them, and sounded like scripture to those who heard. Among the heartfelt expressions was this psalm by Brother Robert Newman:

*Thankfulness I give to thee, O God,  
For this family which thou*

*Hast given me  
Each one, a precious child of thine.  
Strengthen me to be deserving.*

And this by Brother John Tinney:

*For the opportunity of a second chance,  
I praise thee;  
Through repentance, my life has purpose again.  
Praise to thy name.*

David, the psalmist, became our friend and colleague that day.