

How To Study the Psalms for Yourself

First Hand Truth

¹⁰ The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to **Berea**, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹ Now these Jews were **more noble** than those in Thessalonica; they **received** the word with all eagerness, **examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.** ¹² Many of them **therefore believed**, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men.

Acts 17:10-12 ESV

Study it for Yourself

Noble / of noble birth / a willingness to learn

Received / receive readily information and regard it as true.

Eagerness / willingness, zeal, readiness

Examine / to engage in careful study of a question, to judge, to evaluate



FIRST HAND TRUTH

EQUIPPING PEOPLE TO STUDY GOD'S WORD

What is First Hand Truth?

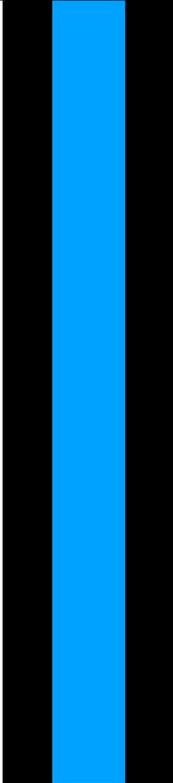
– *The Short Answer* –

Equipping people to study God's Word

– *A Little More Info* –

First Hand Truth exists to **equip** people to study God's Word. We attempt to both **encourage** greater desire to study the Word and to **educate** people to raise their confidence to study the Word for themselves.

We do this through **weekly local workshops** in Battle Creek, Michigan (called *Adventures in Bible Study*), and through speaking opportunities and workshops with individuals, families, churches, and schools both locally and distant.



The More Important Question is **Who is Jesus?**

– *The Short Answer* –

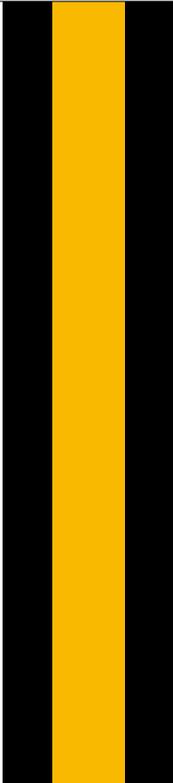
Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah spoken of in the Old Testament, come from God to save people from their sins and give them a new kind of life.

– *A Little More Info* –

Who is the Redeemer of God's elect?

The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, (1 Tim. 2:5–6) who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, (John 1:14, Gal. 4:4) and so was, and continueth to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, for ever. (Rom. 9:5, Luke 1:35, Col. 2:9, Heb. 7:24–25)

The Westminster Shorter Catechism: With Scripture Proofs



What is the Bible?

– *The Short Answer* –

The Word of God

– *A Little More Info* –

What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?

The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, (2 Tim. 3:16, Eph. 2:20) is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him. (1 John 1:3–4)

The Westminster Shorter Catechism: With Scripture Proofs

We believe God's word is Inspired: Verbal Plenary Inspiration

Verbal = down to the words

Plenary = completely, fully

Inspiration = from the very breath of God

Bible Study is...

Not about just knowledge acquisition

Not about finding evidence justifying your own
opinions / confirmation bias

The Word of God is God breathed / His very Words...

Inspired by God / written by men / they wrote real
words within the context of real **languages** in real
cultural contexts in a real **history** about real **people** and
things

Your task in Bible Study is to determine as best you
can what the authors meant when they put the pen to
the paper — what was their intent?

Not your intent — Not just “what I get out of it”

Bible Study can be dangerous to you and to others around you if...

...it is not combined with faith / hollow

...it is not empowered by the Spirit / flesh

...it is not measured with humility / arrogance

It has been used to put others down, not build them up

It has been used as a means of control

**It should change you into a person like Christ / not
a person who acts like they are God**

The Psalms

The Psalms are the anatomy of all parts of the Soul.” **John Calvin**

The most valuable thing the Psalms do for me is to express the same delight in God which made David dance.” **C.S. Lewis**

The Psalms speak of Jesus

“Everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled / Luke 22:44

What is the hebrew word behind the word “psalm” ?

✦ The Hebrew word behind “psalm” is *mizmor*, which derives from the root *zamar*, meaning “to make or produce music in praise to God.”¹ Related nouns formed from this same root include *zimrah* (“melody, song”) and *zamir* (“song”).¹

It’s worth noting that the English word “psalm” itself has a different origin. The English title “Psalms” comes from the Greek *psalmoi*, “songs of praise,” by way of the Latin *Liber Psalmorum*, “book of psalms.”² The Greek *psalmoi* derives from the verb *psallo*, meaning “sing (to the accompaniment of a harp).”²

The Hebrew tradition used a different term for the collection as a whole. In rabbinic and later literature, the book is called *Sefer Tehillim*, “book of praises,”² with *tēhillîm* (“praises”) derived from the Hebrew root *hll*, meaning “praise.”² So while *mizmor* emphasizes the musical and compositional aspect of individual psalms, *tehillim* highlights their fundamental character as expressions of praise to God.

¹ Eugene E. Carpenter and Philip W. Comfort, in *Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words: 200 Greek and 200 Hebrew Words Defined and Explained* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 144.

² James Limburg, “Psalms, Book of,” in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:523.



The Psalms

The psalms were written primarily from the time of David (1043bc) through the time of the post-exilic period (450bc).

They were compiled by an individual or a group of individuals after the nation returned from exile.

They had a purpose, and that purpose is discoverable in the way they were grouped and compiled.

The Psalms

Hebrew Poetry

Not like English Poetry / meter and rhyme

Focuses on themes, structure and **parallelism**

- **Synonymous parallelism** / saying roughly the same thing in two different ways on two different lines
- **Antithetical parallelism** / saying the opposite...
- **Synthetical parallelism** / building on ideas...
 - **BUT ALSO** / many variations of these ideas...

Inclusio / bookends

Imagine if you will...

You and some of your family just made it home from being exiled for 70 years. You are not quite free, but better off than before.

Most of you have never seen home, just heard stories. Some have. They weep when they see it in the state it is in.

You were told as a child that God would bless your nation
You were told that God would bring about a King forever from David's line

What happened to that King? What happened to that line?
Did God's promises fail?

Yes, you are back in your country, but there is no King.
And things ahead look bleak

The glorious temple of Solomon is gone
The walls of your city are gone

What might you be thinking?

An Article to Read

Messianism and the Psalms, Seth Postell

In the Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy

1 / *The Psalms aren't just a slightly Messianic in nature, but rather primarily Messianic in nature* / they speak of Jesus the Messiah, the Christ

2 / *The Structure of the Book of Psalms, the 5 books tell of an integrated story* / In Short — it looks like the Messianic line has failed, but it has not. God will keep his promises.

The 5 Books of the Psalms

1 / **Psalms 1-41** / Reign of David and Solomon / Laments

2 / **Psalms 42-72** / Reign of David and Solomon / Extension

3 / **Psalms 73-89** / Divided kingdom / failure of the line?

4 / **Psalm 90-106** / Exile / God's faithfulness despite Israel's unfaithfulness / God remembers covenant

5 / **Psalm 107-150** / Community restoration / Love of God

Attributes of the Psalms

Structure / strophe / chiasmic X / acrostic

Genre / lament / praise / hymn / royal / etc.

Tags / superscriptions / imprecatory / etc.

Attribution / the attributed author

~ psalm 4 ~

Structure / strophe / **chiastic X** / acrostic

Genre / **lament** / praise / hymn / royal /etc.

Tags / To the Choirmaster: with stringed instruments” / N**gî**nah = music on strings /

Attribution / “a Psalm of David” / **mizmar** / an accompanied song, music, melody

Authorship Distribution List

	Book I	Book II	Book III	Book IV	Book V
David	38	18	1	2	15
Anonymous	3	3		14	28
Korahites		8	4		
David LXX		2		9	1
Anonymous LXX		1			2
Asaph		1	11		
Solomon		1			1
Ethan			1		
Herman			1		
Moses				1	
Haggai LXX					3
Zechariah LXX					3

Genre Distribution List

	Book I	Book II	Book III	Book IV	Book V
Lament	22	18	9	3	7
Praise	3	7	4	12	15
Hymn	2				15
Royal	4	2	1	1	2
Wisdom	3	2	2		2
Thanksgiving	4		1		3
Trust	3	2		1	

~ How to Study a Psalm ~

1 / write it out / see it / hear it / understand it

2 / **emotional** walkthrough

3 / structure / **thematic** walkthrough

4 / **relational** walkthrough

5 / **theological** walkthrough

6 / an **applicational** walkthrough

~ How to Study a Psalm ~

1 / write it out / see it / hear it / understand it

~ How to Study a Psalm ~

1 / write it out / see it / hear it / understand it

2 / **emotional** walkthrough

2 / Take an Emotional Walkthrough

- What does this psalm **make you feel**?
- What is your **initial emotional reaction**?
- Highlight highly emotional **words** of **phrases**
- Highlight **imagery** that is intended to paint pictures in your mind
- Highlight words that **evoke description** for the senses / seeing / smelling / hearing / tasting / feeling

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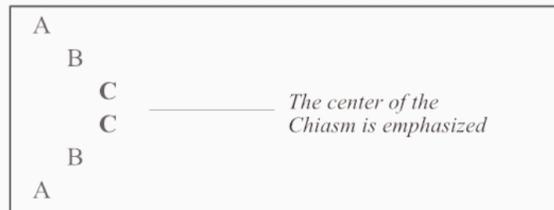
2 / emotional walkthrough

3 / structure / **thematic** walkthrough

3a / Consider the Structure

Determine the structure using Bible helps so that you can see the structure visually. Use this to better organize the next step below.

If your structure is **chiastic**, consider the center section of the psalm with a bit more thought. Why is this center emphasized? What is the purpose?



36 / Take a Thematic Walkthrough

For each strophe or paragraph take some time to read it and think through and assign a **subject** (*what is it about*) and a **complement** (*what does it say about the subject*) for each; this will help you see the overall flow of the Psalm as a whole unit. These should be fairly brief.

Example / Psalm 3:1-2

Subject: (many) Foes...

Complement: ...rise against and condemn me

TITLE TO THE CHOIRMASTER: WITH STRINGED INSTRUMENTS. A PSALM OF DAVID.

A —

¹ Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness!
You have given me relief when I was in distress.
Be gracious to me and hear my prayer!

B —

² O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame?
How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? *Selah*

C —

³ But know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself;
the LORD hears when I call to him.
⁴ Be angry, and do not sin;
ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.
Selah
⁵ Offer right sacrifices,
and put your trust in the LORD.

B —

⁶ There are many who say, "Who will show us some good?
Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD!"

A —

⁷ You have put more joy in my heart
than they have when their grain and wine abound.
⁸ In peace I will both lie down and sleep;
for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

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3 / structure / thematic walkthrough

4 / **relational** walkthrough

4 / Take a Relational Walkthrough

- What does this psalm tell us about our **relationship** with God or God's relationship with us?
- How does the psalmist relate to God?
- What does he do **to** relate to God.
- What are some things to emulate? Avoid?
- What are crucial things described?

~ How to Study a Psalm ~

1 / write it out / see it / hear it / understand it

2 / emotional walkthrough

3 / structure / thematic walkthrough

4 / relational walkthrough

5 / **theological** walkthrough

5 / Take a Theological Walkthrough

- While the Psalms are **not theological treatises** they do often help us understand who God is, who we are, and the reality of what is.
- What does this psalm say about the **God**?
What does it say about **humankind**?
- What does this psalm say about being right with God? Salvation? Sin?

• Consider in particular the person of **Messiah** (the anointed (Christ), the coming Son of God, Son of David, the King eternal) is both displayed and foretold in the pages of the Psalms. 

* The Psalms are not only periodically about Messiah, they are steeped in the concept of Messiah by their very structure.

✦ **Psalm 4** is classified as an indirect messianic psalm **1**, though its messianic significance operates differently than in explicitly messianic psalms.

The psalm's messianic dimension emerges through the king's representative role—David embodies a dynasty to whom God covenanted loyalty, and his anointing generated expectations of joy and peace **2**. However, David himself did not experience the fullness of these blessings, nor did he witness the conversion of all his enemies, and throughout the Old Testament the godly awaited the promised era of peace, joy, and restoration **2**. It was not until Jesus came that the godly had reason to hope for the fullness of the blessings God had bestowed through the Anointed One **2**.

The connection to messianism also appears in specific terminology. In **Psalm 4**, David claims to be Yahweh's *hāsîd*—"one in whom God manifests his grace and favor" **3**. This same term connects David with messianic language in **Psalm 89:19–20**, where God speaks of having "set the crown on a hero" and "anointed him"—cognate terms for Messiah **3**.

So while **Psalm 4** is not a direct prediction of the Messiah like **Psalm 22** or **Psalm 110**, its messianic character lies in how David's experience of God's covenant faithfulness and his role as an anointed king point forward to the ultimate fulfillment of those promises in Christ.

- 1** Bruce K. Waltke, James M. Houston, and Erika Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), **210**.
- 2** Willem A. VanGemeren, "Psalms," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), **81**.
- 3** Walter C. Kaiser Jr. et al., *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), **265**.



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1 / write it out / see it / hear it / understand it

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5 / theological walkthrough

6 / an applicational walkthrough

6 / Take a *Applicational Walkthrough*

- Consider the message of the psalmist, and apply what he intends you to do with your thoughts and your behavior in response.

2 Timothy 3:16

	Positive	Corrective
Truth	Teaching	Reproof
Lifestyle	Training	Correction

**What if you were asked to summarize
Psalm 4 into a simple sentence?**

What would you say?

**What was the Psalmist's desire for
you after you heard, sang and
thought about it?**

What is your one takeaway?

Post Event Survey

- * Make it happen on paper
- * Make it happen online with qr code
- * Or not at all...

