

Dr. Ted Hildebrandt, Praise of God in Book II of the Psalter, Session 1: Canonical Context of Book II, Podcast Audio Overview

Sponsored by Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome back, everyone. Today, we're going to be diving deep into book two of the Psalms. Oh yeah.

That's Psalms 42 through 72. Okay. For those who are following along.

Right. And this section is really cool because it takes us on this journey from lament to praise, which I think everyone can relate to- those highs and lows that we all experience in life. Right.

And what's even more interesting is that Book Two isn't just a random collection of poems. It's actually structured almost like a story. It's got like a beginning, a middle, and an end.

Oh wow. And so our guide for this deep dive is a lecture by Dr. Ted Hildebrandt. And specifically, he's talking about the praise of God found in these Psalms.

So you know how we usually read the Psalms as individual poems? Right. Dr. Hildebrandt points out that they're actually organized into five books, just like the Torah. Oh wow.

Five books of the Psalms, five books of the Torah. Interesting. And each of these books they end with specific markers, like a double amen and a statement of praise.

So this structure is so deliberate. Yeah. It really makes you think about the connection between the Psalms and the Torah.

It's like they're meant to be read together or something. Yeah. Almost like the Psalms are responding to the Torah in some way.

Definitely. So if we zero in on book two specifically, we find what scholars call the second Davidic collection, which covers Psalms 51 through 70. Right.

But there are some interesting curveballs thrown in. Oh. Like, for example, we have contributions from the Sons of Korah earlier in the book.

Yeah. I've always found those interesting. And then there's this one Psalm that's a bit out of place.

Oh, which one? It's an Asaph Psalm, Psalm 50. Oh yeah. Psalm 50.

Now we usually see Asaph Psalms grouped together. Right. Later on.

Later in this altar. But this one's just kind of dropped right in the middle of book two. It's kind of strange when you think about it.

And it just makes you wonder why. Like, it's almost like someone's sending us a message or something. Right.

Yeah. Like, what's the significance of that placement? Exactly. So let's talk about this whole Elohist Psalter thing.

Okay. Dr. Hildebrand points out this shift in divine names. That happens in Psalms 42 through 83.

Okay. And it's pretty noticeable. So what do you mean by a shift? Well, we see less of the name Yahweh, which is usually translated as Lord.

Right. And we see a lot more of Elohim, which is translated as God. So like, how much less Yahweh? Well, in most of the Psalms, the ratio of Yahweh to Elohim is about six to one.

Six to one. Okay. But in this section, it flips.

It's almost the opposite. That's a big difference. Yeah.

And we can actually see this play out in two specific Psalms. Which ones? Psalms 14 and 53. Okay.

I know those. Now, these two songs are almost identical. Right.

But Psalm 14 uses Yahweh, and Psalm 53 uses Elohim in the exact same verse. No. It's almost like someone went in and deliberately edited these Psalms.

Yeah, to emphasize something. To highlight different aspects of God's nature. I wonder what the reason for that could be.

Well, that's the million-dollar question, isn't it? It is. Scholars have been debating this for centuries. Centuries.

Wow. Some suggest it reflects different authorship. Or different stages of compilation.

Others see it as a way of emphasizing different attributes of God. In different contexts. Right, exactly.

Yeah, it's fascinating. But whatever the reason is, it definitely makes us think about how these names shape our understanding of God and his relationship with humanity. That's a good point.

And speaking of understanding, Dr. Hildebrandt talks about the narrative flow of Book Two. Okay. And he suggests that it takes us on a journey.

A journey we're to. It starts with this intense longing for God. Then it moves to finding him in Zion.

Okay. And then ultimately we see his praise reaching the ends of the earth. Wow, so like a progression.

Right, like a spiritual journey. Yeah. And that journey, it begins with this really haunting question.

What's the question? It's posed in Psalms 42 and 43. Oh, okay. And it simply asks, "Where is your God? Where is your God? Wow, that's powerful.

Yeah, and Dr. Hildebrandt suggests that this question probably resonated really deeply with the Israelites. Oh, yeah. You know, during times of exile and uncertainty.

When they were feeling lost. Exactly, like imagine feeling displaced. Far from home.

Yeah, and questioning everything you thought you knew. Your whole world's been turned upside down. Right, so that question: where is your God? Yeah.

It must have just cut to the very core of their being. Absolutely. And I think it's a question that still speaks to us today.

It does. You know, we might not be facing literal exile. Right.

But I think we've all had moments where we felt lost. Yeah. Disconnected, as if we've just completely lost sight of what gives our lives meaning.

Totally. And that's the power of the Psalms. They tap into these, like, universal human experiences.

Yeah. In a way that transcends time and culture. They're timeless, really.

So going back to that feeling of being lost. Okay. Dr. Hildebrand suggests that Psalms 46 through 55 offer a response to that question.

The "Where is your God" question. Exactly. And they point us towards Zion.

Zion. The city of God, the place of security and belonging. Oh, I see.

And specifically, they focus on Mount Zion. Okay. Where the temple was located.

Right. The very heart of Israel's religious and national identity. Makes sense.

And Psalm 48 describes Zion as the city of the great king. The city of the great king. Okay.

Which highlights the kingship of God. Yeah. Which is a theme that we see throughout the Psalms.

And it becomes increasingly important as we move through book two. I'm seeing a pattern here. Right.

So we've got longing. We've got exile. Yeah.

We've got this search for God that leads us to Zion. It's quite a journey. Quite a narrative arc.

And along the way, we encounter some fascinating thematic shifts. Oh, like what? Well, Dr. Hildebrandt mentions wisdom in Psalm 49. Okay.

A discussion of sacrifices in Psalms 50 and 51. Interesting. And then a really deep exploration of sin in Psalms 52 and 53.

Sin, huh? It makes you wonder why these particular themes are clustered together here. Yeah, it does. It's almost as if they're building on one another.

Like guiding us through something. Like a process of reflection and transformation. I like that.

So we start with this search for wisdom. Okay. Then we confront the issue of true worship versus empty rituals in the discussion of sacrifices.

Yeah, that makes sense. And then we delve into the consequences of sin. Okay.

And then for repentance and forgiveness. So it's like a natural progression. Right.

It's interesting how sin and repentance are addressed right after that section on sacrifices. Yeah. It's almost like you said, a natural progression.

Yeah. Moving from outward forms of worship. To inward transformation.

Exactly. The transformation of the heart. Powerful stuff.

And then if we consider the placement of Psalm 50, that Asaph Psalm we talked about earlier, it seems to be strategically positioned to bridge those two themes. Oh, how so? Well, because Psalm 50 challenges the notion that God needs or desires animal sacrifices. Right.

It emphasizes that true worship comes from a sincere heart. Yeah. From aligning our actions with God's will.

I see that. And then Psalm 51, which is David's really powerful Psalm of repentance after his sin with Bathsheba. Right, right.

It offers a concrete example of this inward transformation. You know, David doesn't offer animal sacrifices in this Psalm. He offers something else.

He offers a broken and contrite heart. Wow. A commitment to live in accordance with God's law.

That's powerful. So it's this really powerful contrast between outward rituals and genuine inward change. I'm starting to see how all these pieces fit together.

Me too. So we've got wisdom, sacrifice, sin, repentance. It's like we're being guided through this process of spiritual refinement.

Yeah. I think that's a great way to put it. And remember that scholar Botha that we mentioned? Botha, yeah.

He makes this fascinating connection between Psalms 52 through 55. Oh, what's the connection? He links them through their shared title, Maskell? Maskell, which means? Which means instruction. Okay.

And through their focus on the power of words. Specifically, the tongue as a dangerous weapon. Oh, wow.

That's a powerful image. It's a powerful theme, especially in today's world. Yeah, where words can be used so carelessly.

Right, to hurt and divide. Absolutely. So what do you think Botha is trying to tell us by highlighting this connection? Well, I think he's inviting us to consider the ethical implications of our speech.

Okay. To be mindful of the power of our words. To build up or tear down.

Exactly. To heal or to harm. It's a call to use our voices responsibly.

Yes. To speak truth. To promote justice.

Yeah. To offer words of comfort and encouragement. I love that.

It takes these ancient texts and makes them so relevant to our lives today. It really does. So we've got this incredible structure.

Yeah. This divine name puzzle. And all these intriguing themes swirling around.

I know, it's a lot to take in. Where do we even begin to unpack all of this? Well, maybe. Maybe we can start by looking at some of the key characters that Dr. Hildebrand identifies.

Characters, all right. He says these characters are central to understanding not just Book Two, but the entire Psalter. Okay, I'm intrigued.

Who are these characters? Well, he points to the enemy. Okay. The psalmist and the king.

The enemy, the psalmist, and the king. Yeah, and he suggests that understanding these roles, not just as individuals, but as archetypes. Can help us unlock the deeper spiritual truths embedded in psalms.

Archetypes, huh? That's interesting. Yeah. So let's start with the enemy.

What does this figure represent? So the enemy represents those forces. Okay. Both internal and external.

That threaten our well-being. Okay. Our faith, our very sense of self.

So it's not necessarily like a specific person. It's more like a representation of the challenges and obstacles we face in life. Exactly.

And Dr. Hildebrandt uses some pretty vivid language to describe the enemy's actions. Like what? He talks about taunting, trapping, shaming, dishonoring, even seeking to kill and destroy. Really? So it evokes this sense of danger and threat.

That's intense. Yeah. It sounds like a real battle is being waged.

It is a battle. And notice how the enemy often uses words as weapons. Oh, yeah.

Which kind of echoes that theme from Psalms 52 through 55 that we talked about earlier. Oh, right, right. They spread lies.

They sow discord. They try to isolate us from God and from each other. It's like a spiritual attack.

It's almost like a psychological and spiritual battle. Yeah. Alongside a physical one.

And then in the midst of all this, we have the psalmist. Right. The one crying out for help.

Yeah. The one who's experiencing these attacks. And they often feel helpless, right? Yeah.

In the face of these attacks. They plead with God for deliverance, for protection, for justice. They say they're desperate.

And their prayers are so raw and honest. Yeah. They're full of pain and anguish.

They don't sugarcoat their struggles. They're real. And it makes them feel so relatable.

Yeah. Even thousands of years later. Totally agree.

I think that's what makes the psalm so powerful. It is. They give voice to our own experiences of suffering, doubt, and fear.

Mm-hmm. They remind us that it's okay to not be okay. Right.

To acknowledge our vulnerabilities. Yeah. And to seek help from a higher power.

Absolutely. And that's where the king comes in, right? Yes. God is king.

God is king. The rescuer, the protector. The one who ultimately renders justice.

Exactly. It's like having this powerful ally on your side. Yeah.

Someone who can intervene and turn the tide of battle. Mm-hmm. Like a warrior king.

And this metaphor of God as king, it shapes so much of our understanding of the psalms. Yeah. And really much of the Old Testament.

The Old Testament. Okay. The king is the ultimate authority.

Uh-huh. The source of hope and strength. Okay.

So we have these three characters. Right. The enemy who seeks to destroy.

Yeah. The psalmist who cries out for help.

And the king who intervenes to save. Powerful dynamic. It's a pretty powerful dynamic.

It is. And what's interesting is that these roles. Yeah.

They aren't always clearly defined. Right. Sometimes the enemy is a literal foe.

Okay. Sometimes it's a metaphorical representation of our inner demons. Our inner demons.

Yeah. Sometimes the psalmist is David himself.

Sometimes it's the collective voice of Israel. The voice of Israel. Interesting.

And sometimes the kingly actions of God. Yeah. They're manifest in outward events.

Okay. And sometimes they're experienced as inner strength and guidance. Inner strength.

So it's not always black and white. Right. Completely categorical.

It's complex. There's a complexity and nuance to these characters. Definitely.

That makes them even more compelling. I agree. And I think that complexity invites us to engage with the psalms on multiple levels.

Oh, how so? Well, to see ourselves in the psalmist. Okay. To recognize the enemies we face.

Mm-hmm. And to discover the ways in which God as king is at work in our lives. Powerful stuff.

So I'd love to dig into that idea of God as king a bit more. Dr. Hildebrandt emphasizes how this metaphor shapes our understanding. Yeah.

Not just of Book Two, but of the entire Psalter. The whole Psalter. Okay.

And he points out that the kingship of God is often portrayed in the context of praise. Praise. Okay.

We see this especially in those concluding hymns in Book Two. Oh, you mean Psalms 65 through 68? Exactly. Okay.

Those hymns are like a crescendo of praise. Wow. Celebrating God's power, his majesty, his goodness.

Powerful hymns. They paint this vivid picture of God as a righteous ruler who brings justice. Okay.

Protects the vulnerable and provides for his people. It's beautiful. And that idea of justice seems really important here.

It does. It's not just about God being powerful. Right.

But about him using that power. Yes. To uphold righteousness.

Mm-hmm. And to restore what's been broken. And remember that theme of exile and return that we talked about earlier? Exile and return.

The restoration that the psalmist longs for. It's not just about returning to a physical location. That's deeper than that.

It's about the restoration of right relationships. Right relationships. With God, with each other, and with a created world.

With creation. Wow. It's like a vision of shalom.

Shalom. That Hebrew concept of wholeness and peace. Wholeness and peace.

That encompasses all aspects of life. All aspects. Okay.

And the psalm suggests that this shalom, yes. Is ultimately found in God's reign.

God's reign. In submitting to his kingship. Okay.

And aligning our lives with his will. Aligning our lives. Yeah.

That's beautiful. It is. And speaking of shalom.

Yeah. There's a line in Psalm 67 that really captures this vision. Oh, what's the line? It says, "May the peoples praise you, O God."

God. May all the peoples praise you.

May the nations be glad and sing for joy. Glad and sing for joy. For you rule the peoples justly.

Justly. And guide the nations of the earth. Wow.

That's powerful. It's such a powerful image. It is.

The world transformed by God's justice and love. Yeah. A world where all nations live in harmony and peace.

Harmony and peace. It's a vision that we can all strive for. We can.

Even in our own small ways. Our own small ways. By seeking to live justly.

Yeah. To love mercy. Mm-hmm.

And to walk humbly with our God. Beautiful. It's a reminder that these themes are what we're exploring in book two.

Yeah. These ideas of lament and praise.

Exile and return. Okay. The kingship of God.

Right. And the pursuit of shalom. They're important.

They're not just abstract concepts. They're not. They have real-world implications.

Real world. For how we live our lives. How we treat each other.

Yeah. How we engage with the world around us. How they affect everything.

So as we continue our journey through book two. Mm-hmm. I'm curious.

Yeah. What are some of the key takeaways for you so far? That's a good question. What are those like nuggets of wisdom or insight that are sticking with you? Well, I'm really struck by the emphasis on God's kingship.

Okay. And how that connects to the themes of praise. Mm-hmm.

Justice and shalom. Kingship, praise, justice, and shalom. Yeah.

It's a reminder that true peace and wholeness, okay. Are only possible when we acknowledge God's sovereignty.

God's sovereignty. And align our lives with his will. Aligning our lives again.

Yeah. I love that. It's important.

It's not just about our individual well-being. Right. But about seeking the good of the whole community.

The whole community. The whole world. Yeah.

In accordance with God's purposes. Exactly. And the songs remind us that we're not alone in this pursuit.

That's comforting. We have each other. We have the wisdom and guidance of scripture.

Right. And most importantly, we have God. Yes.

Our king. Walking alongside us. Walking alongside us every step of the way.

Powerful image. You know, it's amazing how book two manages to weave together these grand themes. Yeah.

God's kingship, justice, shalom. Mm-hmm. With those really personal experiences of lament and praise.

It's a powerful combination. Really powerful. Yeah.

And I'm really struck by how these concluding hymns, Psalm 65 through 68. Oh, yeah. They seem to bring everything together.

They do. Like a culmination. Like a culmination of the journey, right? Mm-hmm.

From those depths of despair and those opening laments. Yeah. To this crescendo of praise and thanksgiving.

It's beautiful. There's a real sense of triumph in these hymns. Absolutely.

The celebration of God's faithfulness and power. It's like a victory lap. And notice how they connect the kingship of God with the restoration of his people.

Yeah. It's not just about God ruling from afar. Right.

It's about him actively intervening. Intervening to do what? To bring justice, to heal what's been broken. To make things right.

And that restoration, as we've talked about, it goes beyond just the physical return from exile. Right. It's deeper.

It's about the restoration of right relationships. Okay. A return to wholeness and harmony.

Shalom. Shalom. It just keeps coming back, doesn't it? It does.

It's a central theme. It's like a thread that runs through the entire book. Definitely.

But you know, it's important to know. That this vision of shalom is not passive. Okay.

It's not just about, like, sitting back and waiting for God to fix everything. So we have a part to play. We do.

It's about actively participating in the work of restoration. Okay. Seeking justice, pursuing peace.

Living rightly. Living in right relationship with God and each other. So it's a two-handed kind of thing.

Right. We trust in God, but we also take action. We trust in God's sovereignty, but we also recognize our own responsibility to act.

To act in ways that align with his will. And I think that's where the practice of praise comes in. Praise.

It's not just about singing happy songs when things are going well. It's deeper than that. It's about choosing to focus on God's goodness and faithfulness.

Even when things are tough. Even in the midst of suffering. Yeah.

Even when we don't understand his ways. It's a choice. It's like a reorientation of our hearts and minds.

A shift in perspective. Yeah. Shifting from fear and scarcity to faith and abundance.

And it's a powerful antidote to the enemy's attempts to discourage and dishearten us. Right. The enemy wants us to give up.

But when we choose to praise, we're choosing to align ourselves with God's power, his love, his ultimate victory. That's powerful. So as we wrap up our deep dive into book two, I'm just left with this overwhelming sense of gratitude.

Gratitude for what? For the richness and depth of these ancient prayers. They really are incredible. They offer so much wisdom, so much comfort, so much gut.

The ball of life's challenges. For navigating the complexities of life. It's a gift.

It is. And I think one of the most important takeaways from book two. What's that? Is that the spiritual life is a journey.

Okay. It's not a destination. A journey, not a destination.

There will be times of lament, times of exile. Yeah. Times when we feel lost and disconnected.

Like we talked about. But the Psalms assure us that even in those dark moments, God is present. He's listening.

He's there. And he's waiting to guide us back to a place of wholeness and peace. And the journey itself is sacred.

It is. With all its twists and turns. Ups and downs.

Highs and lows. It's in the wrestling, the questioning, the seeking. That we grow.

That we discover the depths of God's love and faithfulness. Beautifully said. And book two also challenges us.

To what? To consider how we can be agents of Shalom in the world. Shalom, yeah. How we can participate in the work of restoration and healing.

How we can use our voices to speak truth, to promote justice, to offer hope to those who are struggling. It's a call to action. It's a powerful one.

It's not just about our personal relationship with God. Right. But about how that relationship compels us to engage with the world around us.

To make a difference. And I think that's what makes the Psalms so relevant, so timeless, so deeply human. They speak to our deepest longings.

They speak to the longing in each of our hearts. For what? For wholeness, for connection, for meaning. Yeah.

For a world transformed by God's love and justice. It's a beautiful vision. Well, we've covered a lot of ground today.

I have. And I have to say, this has been a truly enriching deep dive. I agree.

Thank you for joining us on this journey through Book Two of the Psalms. It's been a pleasure. And we hope that you, our listeners, will continue to explore these beautiful and powerful texts.

Yeah, don't let the journey end here. Allow them to speak to your own lives. To your own experiences.

And to guide you on your own unique spiritual journeys. Each journey is unique. And as you go forth, dear listener, we leave you with this final thought.

Okay, I'm listening. Where do you find yourself on this journey from lament to praise? Good question. What are those places of exile in your own life? Places of exile.

And how might the Psalms guide you towards a deeper experience of God's presence? God's presence. His kingship. His kingship.

And God's shalom. Shalom to you.