

Dr. Ted Hildebrandt, Praise of God in Book II of the Psalter, Session 2, Characters of the Psalms, 6-min. Video Overview

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If you've ever thought the Book of Psalms is just a nice collection of old poems and songs, well, I want you to think again. It's actually a stage. A stage for a powerful 3,000-year-old drama that's packed with conflict, desperation, and ultimately heroic rescue.

So come on, let's pull back the curtain and meet the cast. You know, this raw, desperate cry? It's really at the heart of the whole story. To really understand this epic drama, we first need to meet the characters who live out this intense spiritual thirst on every single page.

So here's our playbill for this explainer. We're going to meet the three main characters, see exactly how they interact, and then discover how their struggle leads to this powerful cycle of praise. Every great story is driven by its characters, right? And the Psalms are absolutely no exception.

The entire emotional landscape of the book is shaped by the push and pull between three key figures who we're about to meet. Okay, first up is our protagonist. This is the character we experience the whole drama through.

We call this character the psalmist, or the suppliant. So what exactly is a suppliant? Well, it's just someone who's in desperate need, and they come to a higher power, in this case God, pleading for help. Their main motivation is this deep, profound thirst for God's presence, for his intervention.

It's a theme you see woven all through the Psalms, from chapter 42 to 63. And let me tell you, the suppliant is on an absolute emotional roller coaster. One minute, they feel totally crushed, completely abandoned.

But then, in the very next breath, they're clinging to hope, often repeating a refrain to their own soul, something like, "Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him. Of course, no drama is complete without a villain, right? So the second character on our stage is the enemy. This is the antagonist who creates the central conflict and makes the suppliant's life so incredibly difficult.

And check out how the enemy is described. These are not just some generic bad guys. Oh no.

They're portrayed with these visceral, absolutely terrifying animal metaphors. We're talking ravenous lions with teeth like spears, venomous snakes, and wild dogs prowling the city. This language isn't just poetic.

It's meant to make you feel the real, life-threatening danger. So what does this enemy actually do? They are actively working to bring the suppliant down. They taunt them with

these cynical questions, like, "So, where is your God now? They conspire behind the scenes, setting snares and traps.

Their ultimate goal is simple: to devour, to shame, and to destroy the righteous. So with our protagonist in serious peril and a vicious antagonist on the attack, the stage is perfectly set for a hero to enter. And in the drama of the Psalms, that hero is the mighty divine king.

Now, this is really interesting. While the New Testament often uses the metaphor of father for God, back in the Old Testament, the dominant metaphor is king. That one word, king, it just encapsulates everything.

Ultimate sovereignty, raw power, the authority to make covenants, and the responsibility to rule the entire universe. And this metaphor doesn't just come out of nowhere. In the Psalms, the ideal human king was supposed to be a protector of the weak and a crusher of the oppressor.

So that earthly ideal, it becomes the blueprint for understanding the divine king as the ultimate defender of society's most vulnerable, the orphan and the widow. So what defines this king's character? Well, three key Hebrew terms pop up again and again. First, there's *hesed*.

Think of this as an unfailing, stubborn, covenant-keeping love that just never quits. Then you have *zedek*, which is a deep moral righteousness. And finally, *mishpat*, which is the active execution of justice that makes sure the poor and oppressed get a fair shake.

This central metaphor of the king as a protector just explodes into a whole network of related images. He is a rock you can hide behind, a fortress that can't be breached, a strong tower, a refuge. All of these different images, they all point to one core idea: safety.

Okay, so now we have our three characters: the desperate suppliant, the vicious enemy, and the powerful king. Now let's see how they interact on stage to create the recurring plotline of the Psalms. You see this four-step cycle playing out over and over and over.

First, the enemy attacks. Second, the cornered suppliant cries out to the king for rescue. Third, and this is the good part, the king intervenes, saving the suppliant and bringing justice down on the enemy.

And what's the result? The fourth and final act: praise. This quote right here gets to the very heart of that final step. You see, the praise isn't just some abstract feeling of happiness.

No, it's a testimony. It's the suppliant now rescued, turning to everyone around them and saying, Hey, come and listen. Let me tell you my story.

Let me tell you what the king has done for me. And this brings us to an absolutely crucial insight. Praise in the Psalms isn't born from a comfortable life.

It is born directly from the experience of deliverance. Being rescued from real, tangible trouble provides the concrete, undeniable reason for the Psalmist to turn back to the king and offer praise. So this 3000 year old script reveals a timeless truth that praise is often the direct result of surviving hardship, not just avoiding it.

And it leaves us with a question to chew on: where in our own lives or in the world around us today? Do we see that same pattern where the deepest sense of gratitude and praise emerges, not from ease, but from rescue?