

Dr. Bruce Waltke, Psalms, Hymns--Theology, Hesed, Creation, Kingship, Temple, Session 8, 6-min. Video Overview

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All right, today we are jumping headfirst into the poetic, really complex, and sometimes kind of shocking theology you find in the Psalms. We're going to lean on the work of scholar Dr. Bruce Waltke to see how these ancient songs are so much more than just worship. They're actually a super unique and powerful way of getting to know God.

But let's kick things off with something that might just make you do a double take. Imagine you're reading the Psalms, just enjoying the poetry, and bam, you hit this verse. Leviathan? Crushed heads? Eaten by desert creatures? I mean, it's intense, it's vivid, and let's be honest, it's pretty weird.

So you have to ask, see monsters in the Bible? What is really going on here? Well, to get a handle on images like this, we have to see the Psalms as something bigger than just a songbook. They're actually a unique kind of theology. And according to Dr. Waltke, this whole theological engine starts with one simple, fundamental act: praise.

And that is our first big idea. It's the very structure of these ancient hymns that really drives their theological teaching. The act of praising God actually becomes the method for explaining who God is.

Okay, so let's break this down. A typical hymn in the Psalms usually has this three-part structure. It kicks off with a call to praise.

Think of it like an invitation to a party. And it wraps up with another call to praise. But the real theological meat is right there in the middle, the cause for praise.

This is the part that explains why God is so worthy of praise. And by doing that, the psalmist celebrates his character and his actions. It's so cool.

Their words of praise to God become God's word to us, teaching us about who he is. Well, that brings up a pretty logical next question, right? If these poems are all about explaining why God is so great, then who exactly is this God they're praising? The Psalms answer that by showing us God's core attributes. Theologians tend to split God's character into two big buckets.

You've got the incommunicable attributes. These are the qualities that only God has. They make him totally unique.

Then you have the communicable attributes, which are qualities he can actually share with us, things like love and grace. And the Psalms, they explore both. A really central incommunicable attribute is something called aseity.

Now that's a fancy word, but it's for a massive idea. God comes from himself. He wasn't created.

He doesn't depend on anything for his existence. Everything else- you, me, the universe is derived from him and totally dependent on him. You know, that concept all by itself is a pretty fundamental reason for praise.

So now let's look at God's communicable attributes, the ones he shares. These qualities you see here were famously revealed to Moses right after that whole disastrous golden calf incident. And what that moment shows us is that God's immense power, his aseity, is perfectly balanced by these incredible qualities of mercy and grace.

He's a benevolent King, not some cosmic despot. Okay. And this is where things start to get really interesting because we're about to get to maybe the most surprising part of the Psalms theology: how they use what looks a lot like pagan mythology to explain God's creative power.

To get this, we first need to know about something called the chaos conflict. This was a super common epic myth all across the ancient world. The basic story was always about a hero God fighting a monstrous creature that represented the sea, the ultimate symbol of chaos.

By defeating this monster, the God brings order to the universe and creates the world. So think about it like this. The poet John Milton used figures from Greek mythology in his famous poem, *Paradise Lost*.

Not because he actually believed in Zeus, but because it was a powerful poetic tool. In the exact same way, the Hebrew poets use the mythological language their neighbors would have recognized in a heartbeat. And here is the absolutely brilliant radical theological twist.

The Psalmists weren't endorsing these pagan myths; they were hijacking them. They took this familiar imagery and used it as a polemic, a direct challenge to their neighbors, basically declaring, Hey, it wasn't your God Baal or Marduk who defeated chaos. It was Yahweh, the God of Israel.

And guess what? He did it all by himself. I mean, these were the A-list chaos monsters of the ancient Near East. So when the Psalms talk about crushing the heads of Leviathan or shattering Rahab, they're using these famous names.

It's powerful poetic trash talk to say that at the moment of creation, God single-handedly conquered all the forces of chaos and brought perfect order to the universe. But this high-level cosmic theology about creation and power is made incredibly personal through one of the most important words in the entire Old Testament, *Hesed*. *Hesed* is a word that's notoriously tough to translate into English.

People try with words like mercy, kindness, loving-kindness, or unfailing love. But it's more than just a feeling. It's a loyal, committed, active love that happens inside of a relationship.

And according to Walt Key, it's the number one attribute celebrated in the Psalms. So here's how *Hesed* actually works in the real world. It starts with a relationship.

Then one person in that relationship finds themselves completely helpless. The stronger person intervenes to save them, and this is key: they're motivated purely by loyalty and love. Think about Ruth showing Hesed to her dead husband by finding an heir for his family line.

Or Joseph's brothers showing Hesed by carrying his bones back home for burial, an act he was totally helpless to do for himself. Now when you put these two huge ideas together, a supremely powerful creator God who personally commits himself to his people with this unbreakable Hesed love, you get a totally radical new understanding of something we tend to take for granted, history itself. See, in the pagan world all around Israel, history was seen as cyclical, just kind of aimless, with no real grand purpose.

But the biblical worldview, which gets celebrated in the Psalms, was revolutionary. It saw history as a linear story, with a beginning, a middle, and a climax. This wasn't just a different philosophy; it meant that what people did actually mattered.

History was going somewhere. It was moving toward a final victory of righteousness. And really this is the great synthesis of the Psalms.

They managed to fuse the cosmic poetry of creation, that battle against chaos, with the real, tangible events of human history, like the exodus from Egypt. And the glue holding it all together is the personal relational promise of Hesed. You know, all this leaves us with a pretty fascinating thought.

The psalmists used the most creative language of their time, poetry, metaphor, even twisting myths to communicate these profound truths about God and our world. It kind of makes you wonder, right? What deep truths about our own world are just waiting to be discovered? Maybe hidden in the art, the music, and the poetry of today.