THE CORNERSTONE OF OUR FAITH

Songs Sung in the Key of Life
Selected Psalms
William Jones

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about the author

William Jones has served as the minister for Boulevard church of Christ for more than twenty years. He received his education from Southwestern Christian College, Lipscomb University, and Master’s Seminary and School of Theology. Brother Jones preaches and teaches by presenting scholarly materials in an understandable fashion.

He has been a frequent writer in The Cornerstone of Our Faith Bible study series. He has also been a long-time board member of Agape Child and Family Services and heads his own publishing company. He and his wife have three children.
Each lesson in this *The Cornerstone of Our Faith* study has four major parts.

Every lesson begins with an introductory section called *The Foundation*. In this section, the author will give background material to help prepare your mind and heart for God’s Word.

The second part of each lesson is called *The Cornerstone*. This section is always the heart of every lesson. The Bible is explored in detail to help us understand the text. Those who are accustomed to hearing African-American preaching can hear this section “preach.” God’s Word is powerfully presented so that all can understand.

The next section of each study is critical for the Word to fulfill its intended purpose. It is called *The Inscription*. Just as people take note of inscriptions on cornerstones or monuments, each lesson is written so as to drive home a point worth remembering and a principle worth following. It offers the encouragement to change attitudes or behaviors to align better with God’s Word. To know the Bible is one thing; to do it is another.

Every lesson ends with a series of thought-provoking *Discussion Questions* that help you explore God’s Word on a personal and a congregational level. These questions provide opportunities for group discussion and participation. Teachers can tell by the responses whether their students have really come to grips with the lesson.
introduction

The Psalms is one of the most familiar sections of Scripture. They are moving in their meaning, powerful in their profundity, and amazingly relevant in their application. Each individual song as penned by the psalmist offers us instructive insights into the human condition. They are songs sung in the key of life.

The Psalms are quoted more than any other Old Testament book and quoted more in the book of Hebrews than all the rest of the Old Testament combined. The people of God have been using the Psalms in public and private worship for generations.

In this study we read and learn from these lyrics that lead to life we know as the Psalms. We will unpack selected Psalms to uncover the principles contained therein. We will discover music that moves us, songs that stir us, and lyrics that lift us up.
The Psalms have a wonderful capacity to capture the reality of our human experience. Dr. Samuel Schultz notes in *The Old Testament Speaks* (Harper and Row) “they express the common experience of the human race.”

Composed by numerous authors, the various psalms express the emotions, personal feelings, attitudes, gratitude, and interests of the average individual. They speak often with heart-stopping harmony to the condition of our humanity.

*Introduction to the Psalms*

The English title “Psalms” (or “Psalter”) comes from the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. In the *Codex Vaticanus* (fourth century A.D.) the title *Psalmoi* and the subtitle *Biblos psalmon* (“Book of Psalms”) are used. In the *Codex Alexandrinus* (fifth century) the name *Psalterion* appears.

The Greek word *psalmos*, which translates the Hebrew *mizmor*, signifies music accompanied by stringed instruments. Under the influence of the *Septuagint* (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament), and of Christianity, the word *psalmos* came to designate a “song of praise”
without an emphasis on accompaniment by stringed instruments (Christoph Barth, *Introduction to the Psalms*. N.Y. Scribners and Sons, 1966, p. 1).

The book of Psalms is a collection of songs written in many instances to exalt the great God of heaven. Many were written by David, but not all. They were the Hebrew hymnal. They were often used in the worship of God’s people. Many messianic themes reveal themselves in the Psalms.

### Interpretation of the Psalms

The book of Psalms is divided into five books.

- Book 1 includes Psalms 1-41.
- Book 2 includes Psalms 42-72.
- Book 3 includes Psalms 73-89.
- Book 4 includes Psalms 90-106.
- Book 5 includes Psalms 107-150.

The distinctive feature of Hebrew poetry is not rhyme, but parallelism. That means with Hebrew poetry there is balanced thought from one line to another. The thought in one line of poetry bears a definite relationship to the succeeding line or lines.

There are different types of parallelism in Psalms. There is *Synonymous Parallelism*. In this type of psalm the thought of line one is repeated with different words in line two. This type of parallelism is often divided into two categories. There is identical synonymous parallelism. The second line uses exact synonyms of the key words in the first line. Psalms 19:1, “The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands,” is an example of this type of parallelism. There is also similar synonymous parallelism. The key words in the two lines are not precisely synonyms. The thoughts, however, in both lines are similar. Psalm 20:1, “May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble! May the name of the God of Jacob set you securely on high!” is an example of this type.
There is Antithetic Parallelism. The thought in the first line is contrasted by the thought of the second. Psalm 20:8, “They have bowed down and fallen, But you have risen and stood upright” is an example of this type. There is Synthetic Parallelism. The second line completes the thought of the first line or adds to it. There are several types of synthetic parallelism in the Psalms. There is Completion type of parallelism that is one of rhythm rather than of sense. The second line completes the thought of the first line. “But as for me, I have installed My King, Upon Zion, My holy mountain” (Psalm 2:6) is an example of this type. There is the Comparison type in which the thought of the second line is compared to the thought of the first line as in Psalm 84:10. There is also the Reason type where a reason is given in the second line for the thought in the first line as in Psalm 130:4.

There is Incomplete Parallelism in which elements of line one are omitted from line two but the thought is to be understood for both lines. “May he judge Your people with righteousness, And Your afflicted with justice” (Psalm 72:2) is an example.

There is Inverted Parallelism where the syntax of line one is reversed in line two in an ABBA pattern. “Because he has loved Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him securely on high, because he has known My name” (Psalm 91:14) is an example of this type.

There is Climatic Triplet where three line forms a unit. Each of the three lines is equally forceful in the development of the thought. “For, behold, Your enemies, O LORD, For, behold, Your enemies will perish; All who do iniquity will be scattered” (Psalm 92:9) is this type of Psalm.

Finally, there is what is called External Parallelism, which is the combining of two or more couplets into a single unit of thought. This can be Synonymous as in 18:4-5. It can be Antithetic as in 37:10-11, Inverted as in 137:5-6, and Synthetic as in 44:15-16.
The scope of this work does not permit a detailed examination of all 150 Psalms. The Psalms included in this work were selected to be a broad example of the kind of piercing poetry to be found in the entire collection of the book.

My prayer is as you read, meditate, and study these songs that stir the soul, these lyrics that lead to life, these songs that are sung in the key of life, that you will be encouraged and enlightened. May these lyrics lift up your spirit, stir up your commitment, and build up your faith.

As you read you will find yourself in the Psalms in all of our human condition. The good news is you will also find the great God of heaven who meet our human condition with His heavenly compassion.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is the distinctive feature of Hebrew poetry found in the Psalms?
2. Explain Synonymous parallelism.
3. What type of parallelism is it when the thought in the second line is contrasted with the thought in the first line?
4. Read Psalm 68:2-3, and discuss the type of parallelism found there.
5. Read Psalm 67:1-2, and discuss the type of parallelism found there.
6. Why do you think the book of Psalms is one of the most loved in all of the Bible?