

Psa. 150:1 Hallelu-jah.
Praise God in His sanctuary;
praise Him in the sky, His stronghold.
2 Praise Him for His mighty acts;
praise Him for His exceeding greatness.
3 Praise Him with blasts of the horn;
praise Him with harp and lyre.
4 Praise Him with timbrel and dance;
praise Him with lute and pipe.
5 Praise Him with resounding cymbals;
praise Him with loud-clashing cymbals.
6 Let all that breathes praise the LORD.
Hallelu-jah.

A few Sundays ago I had a chance to enjoy Kat Berry doing a children's story with the boys. Just like with Forrest Gump's *box of chocolates*, you never know what you are going to get with a story with the little ones! A few Sundays ago Kat asked the kids the question "What does it mean to Praise God? What are examples of how we can praise God?" And they went through ideas about what kinds of things would praise God. There was audience participation, and we had a fine time. But as I sat there smiling, listening to the story, I suddenly had another idea for our "Mysteries of the Bible" series of messages. I thought to myself, thank you Kat! I thank her for that today, and now I am going to take us in, to another adventure that I hope will be new to you, and helpful for us all. Today we are going to explore **The Book of Praises**.

If you were to look in the Bible, in that first big part that is usually neglected, and you read it in the original words, you would find a really big collection of materials, but with a name you

probably did not know. In fact, not long ago Jill gave me a little book that came from Israel that possibly belonged to her mother. It was all in Hebrew. She gave it to me and asked “What is this?” I smiled, and got excited and said “THAT IS TEHILLIM!” And she gave me that look that I have seen many times in my life, as if to say *thank you for not being helpful*. And then I explained: this is PSALMS. but all in the original Hebrew. And this odd word (to us) Tehillim literally means “Praises.” So there we have it. Psalms is not really Psalms. It is instead, the Book of Praises. But it should be noted, of the 150 units in this collection, not all are about praising God. Some are very different. But, I would like for us to learn some things today, so if that is OK, let’s jump in and swim.

You are about to see a word, in its original form, that I spoke about on Easter of this year. It is a totally Hebrew word, and you all know it! And there it is. We have heard it today. We see it as one word, although it is actually 2 words. Hallelu jah. And this word means Praise Adonai, or as we would say, Praise the LORD. Hallelu actually is a command, for a group of people to Praise Someone. The little word Jah is a shortened version of the secret holy name of God. As one of my teachers from the past used to say, “here are some other fun facts to know and tell!” Believe it or not, this word we know as “hallelujah” (and Alleluia in Greek) this word only shows up in the Psalms (although it does appear a few other times in the Book of Revelation, but it is only spoken by Angels). So, this is an amazing word!

We have more fun facts to know and tell. Sometimes the collection we call Psalms is also called “the Psalter.” This is a Greek word ($\Psiαλτεριον$) from “psalterion” which was a stringed

instrument they played! As a guitar player, I have to love that! Our next slide shows us that we get our word ‘Psalms’ actually from Latin, our third language of the Bible. Now, let’s just cover these as you will see them: Historically called “Books of David” by Jewish tradition. *** these psalms were sung by choirs/musicians’ guilds at the Temple, in fact this is the main reason they were preserved through so much trouble. Now here is a special and really fun secret of the Bible for us: The Psalms are divided internally into 5 big collections. Psalms 1-41, 42-72, 73-89, 90-106 and 107-150. *** at the end of each division is a special doxological section. Psalm 150 serves as a doxology for the entire collection of Psalms! That is why I had it for us today. By the way, the Psalms are probably divided into 5 parts so that this will imitate the Five Books of Moses, the first 5 books of the Bible. In fact, people will say that the Psalms, Tehillim, are the “sung version of the Torah.” I think that is great.

Let’s do just a few more slides today. This one is easy but maybe unsettling: We are sometimes told that DAVID wrote all of the Psalms. Well, if we check, we see that 73 include David’s name. But there are other names too. And 43 of the Psalms actually have no names on them at all. Another secret of the Bible. Now, this next item is something that you might have seen before. But I would like to show you how it works in English first so that we can understand it. Here we go.

All ice cream is good.

But sometimes it melts all over.

Cats will lick this up.

Dogs wish they could.
Everything will work out.

OK. What is the meaning of our riddle here? Who can see it? This is called Alphabetic Acrostic. And it is something that is done with poetry, and it involves an alphabet. We actually have 7 Psalms in the Bible that were written so that either the first word, or a number of first words follow the order of the alphabet. You can actually see this in some English Bibles by looking at Psalms 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, and 145. The biggest of all the Psalms does this, and that is Psalm 119. Look if you will in your little gold pew Bibles at Psalm 119 (page 676). You will notice something here. This giant Psalm is divided into little chunks. How many verses are in each chunk? Now, how many chunks are there? There are actually 22, and for good reason. There are 22 alphabet letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Let's multiply 8 times 22. And we get? 176. How many verses are in this Psalm? 176. Look at Psalm 25. How many verses are there? 22. Why? Well, you know now.

Let me close for us with two main thoughts that I believe really matter. First, we sometimes refer to the Bible as containing "*the word of God.*" Well, Psalms are different. They seem to be the "***words of US, aimed at God.***" It could be the case, that these words are the main place in the Bible where humans can call out to God. As one teacher once told our class, these words go up to God, and then they come back, in order to bless us. I like that idea. But here is the second thought on these Psalms: I believe that they are bundled messages of spiritual meaning for us. They are mini sermons for us. We don't just read a few verses. We read the whole thing. And we

let it sit, and simmer. Very often the writer will cry out to God, wondering where God is when times are very bad. But at the end, the writer always comes back to the place of trusting that God is still near, and watching. With that idea in mind, we can wrap this up for today. A few weeks ago I suggested that the little Epistle of James was really worth your time, and that you could get into it. Let me suggest that with the Psalms. Please know that they are all different. Please know that the order is mysterious. Please know that there is sometimes much more there than we can see in our English Bibles. But we can access these words, and let them become a part of us. I hope that we will make that choice.

Next week, I will wrap this up by having us look at the first three Gospel stories of the New Testament. May God bless and guide the hearing of these words. AMEN.