

Bible-Reading Coach Podcast Transcript

Week 26: Psalms 73-106 *Books III & IV*

Welcome to Week 26 of the Bible reading coach podcast. My name is Karl Vaters and I'm here to help you read through the entire Bible in 52 weeks.

We are now in the middle of the Psalms, we have two more weeks of Psalms to go. And the reason we've divided the Psalms up in the way that we have is because the Psalms, themselves, are divided up in the way that they are. You may have noticed as you've been reading along, that in week one, we read what's called Book One in Psalms 1 through 41. In week two, we read book two, Psalms 42 through 72. This week coming up, we'll be reading books three and four, that's Psalm 73 through 89, and 90 through 106, respectively. And then the following week, we'll finish it up with book five, which is Psalms 107 through 150.

So that's, first of all, a word about books. Second thing I want to introduce you to this week is something you also may have noticed, but we haven't commented on yet and often pastors don't mention at all, although it's a curiosity to me every time I read it, and it's something called superscription, that is in about 116 of the 150 songs. So all but 34 of the songs, they have what's called a superscription. That is, before verse one, there'll be an introduction, in which they'll name the author, or the type of song or the type of music or when it's to be sung or all of those things together. As an example, Psalm 88 starts like this, "A song, a Psalm of the sons of Korah. For the Director of Music. According to mahalath leannoth. A maskil of Heman the Ezrahite." And then verse one starts.

Now as you're reading through a Bible, translators will put introductions and headings above subject matter and so on. Those headings are added later by translators. But in the book of Psalms, the superscript ones, like the one I just read from Psalm 88, are, in fact, a part of the original Psalms. They were there when Jesus read them in the first century. They weren't added centuries later by English translators as a help. Those extras are helpful, but we need to understand what's a part of the original Bible, and what's been added by translators to help us along. This is part of the original Bible.

So in Psalm 88, for instance, let me read it for you again, it says, "A song," so we know this isn't just a poem, it's something to be sung. Secondly, "A Psalm of the sons of Korah," which means this is what was written by or for the Sons of Korah. We'll get into who Korah was in a moment. "For the Director of Music," in other words, it was given to the person who's leading in worship that day. It's like when a guitarist or a pianist is handing the score for the day, that's how you're going to play this. Okay, "According to mahalath leannoth. A maskil of Heman the Ezrahite." Ezrahite means 'of the group of people who followed Ezra'. Heman would be the person.

Now what do these other words mean? Mahalath, "According to mahalath leannoth". Mahalath is an instrument, something like a guitar, or a lyre, a stringed instrument. We're not sure exactly what it is. But we believe a mahalath is a stringed instrument similar to what we would have as a guitar today. Leannoth is a musical direction that means humble, which means to play this in a sad or a slow manner. Others will give you directions that will be an upbeat thing and other times it will be softer and sader. Similar notations are given today in musical scores, the same way. Different words from the Latin in most musical scores today. But this is Hebrew,

of course for the Psalms. It also says it is a maskil of Heman the Ezrahite and maskil means wisdom, that means this is a Psalm of wisdom for the people to sing. So in that the people who are going to sing it, the people who are going to direct it will tell them how to do that. And in other places we'll see in a moment, it also tells them when to sing it. So we'll see that soon.

So let's get to the passage itself by looking at a couple of the Psalms that you'll be reading this week. First of all, you're going to be reading Psalm 82 coming up this week, and it's one of the confusing Psalms. So let me lay it out for you in advance so when you get there, you'll have a clearer understanding of what you're reading. Bible cynics love this Psalm. People who want to challenge traditional biblical theology, love this Psalm because it throws people into confusion, if you don't understand what you're reading, so let's read it. I'll read it for you. And you'll see where some of the confusion might lie.

Psalm 82 beginning with verse 1. Actually before verse 1 and it says this, "A Psalm of Asaph." and then verse 1 says, "God presides in the great assembly; he renders judgment among the 'gods'. How long will you defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked? Defend the weak and the fatherless, uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed, rescue the weak and the needy, deliver them from the hand of the wicked. The 'gods' know nothing, they understand nothing. They walk out in darkness, all the foundations of the earth are shaken. I said, 'You are gods', you are all sons of the Most High, but you will die like mere mortals, you will fall like every other ruler. Rise up, oh God, judge the earth, for all the nations are your inheritance."

Now, several questions in this. First of all, people who want to be cynics and skeptics of the Bible will ignore the main thrust of the Psalm which is 'uphold the fatherless, uphold the [poor] and the oppressed, rescue the weak', that's the message. But some people will deny the message because they want to pick at it. So what's there to pick up? There's a bunch to pick up. Before we get to the picky parts. Let's first of all understand, who's Asaph? We also already heard about somebody named Korah and the sons of Korah. Korah and Asaph are two of the song leaders at the time.

Asaph, we've seen already, actually in Second Chronicles 16. We see that he was a Levite who David appointed and put him in charge of the worship that would happen in front of the Ark of the Covenant. Asaph is David's worship pastor, David hired him to be the worship pastor and hired those around him as a worship chorus that would worship God in front of the Ark of the Covenant with God's presence literally dwelt on the earth at that time.

But that's not the challenge, of course, in the passage I just read. You may have noticed the challenge, you may have even scratched your head and gone, "What's going on in there?", it talks about the other "gods". And then especially in verse six, where it says, "You are all gods, you are all sons of the Most High". Okay, what's going on here, cynics and skeptics who want to challenge the traditional biblical theology will look at this and go, "Oh, Jesus wasn't anything special, you're all gods." There's a whole subsection of people who want to be, again, cynics and skeptics of the Bible, who will look at this and go, "Oh, ancient Israelites, they believed in all kinds of gods. And it was only way later that the idea of only one God came along, and it's just part of social development and everything else." And that's simply not what's happening here. What's happening here is that they're acknowledging that there are idols that exist and that there are so-called "gods" that exist. In fact, in most of your translations where it says gods, first of all, it will be in lowercase and secondly, it will be in quotation marks, because the word there

is different. It's not the word Jehovah or even the word Adonai. It's the word for foreign gods, okay? It's a different word entirely.

But then it says, "You are all gods, you are all sons of the Most High." So is the Bible telling us we're gods? This is where some people like the Mormons, one of the passages that they'll say that we're all gods, we're all going to inhabit planets, or all kinds of interesting things like that. What's going on here? Well, first of all, verse six begins with this, "I said, 'You are gods, you are all sons of the Most High'". In order to understand what that verse means you have to understand who the "I" is, who's speaking here.

And remember, back when we started the Psalms we established, unlike the rest of the Bible, the rest of the Bible predominantly is God speaking to us, the Psalms is us speaking to God. So this is not God saying "You are gods, you are all sons of the Most High." The "I said," here is the person who wrote the song. Asaph is saying, "I said," or in fact, it might even be phrased, "I used to say, you are all gods, you are sons of the Most High." Asaph may be talking about back when he was an idol worshiper. Because remember, the people of Israel went back and forth, they fell away from God and worshiped idols and they came back to God. And this during David was a time where they had come back to God after having had a time of idolatry and paganism that was among them. Asaph may have fallen away from God and come back and he may be acknowledging his past in which "I said, we're all gods and we're all sons of the Most High," but now he's changed his mind. He's recognizing there's one true God, we are not all gods, but he's reflecting it in this song.

So we need to remember that who's speaking here is not God to us. It's us to God and Asaph may, in fact, be making a confession of former sin so let me reread portions of this with that in mind. "A Psalm of Asaph", Asaph is speaking. Asaph says, "God presides in the great assembly. He renders judgment among the gods," the other so-called gods, the ones that maybe he used to worship as an idol worshiper. Verse 5 "The gods...", these other gods, "...know nothing, they understand nothing". Well, like Hulk said in The Avengers, "Puny God", right? Right. They know nothing and understand nothing; they don't qualify as gods, right? They walk out in darkness, all the foundations of the earth are shaken. Then it says, "I Asaph...", "I said...", or "I, Asaph, used to say..." this, I used to believe this, "...that you are gods, that you are all sons of the Most High." And then he corrected in verse 7 by saying, "But you will die like mere mortals, you will fall like every other ruler. Rise up, oh God, judge the earth for all the nations are your inheritance."

So this is if you take it only out of context and only say, the Bible says, "You are all gods, you are all sons of the Most High". Does the Bible say that? Well, technically, yes, those words are in the Bible. But all you gotta do is expand it by like two words, and include the entire verse, and then add the very next verse. If you really read it in any kind of context and understanding it all you realize, the Bible is not declaring us to be Gods. The Bible is showing us a testimony of someone who used to believe that way and no longer believes that and shows you why they no longer believe it. Because how can you call people gods when we're all gonna die like mere mortals because we are, okay?

So when you read it, this is the importance of context. This is why we're taking the time in this series to talk about, here's the background of it, who's speaking here? Here's the author of it because it changes the meaning, it brings it back to its original meaning, rather than a misunderstanding. So that's what's happening there. I hope that helps you, these handful of

things will help you. The books, the superscriptions, and then of course, the recognition as you're reading the Psalms you're not reading God's speaking to us, you're reading us speaking to God.

But before we finish with this, let's close with a Psalm that I'm simply going to read as a close and then we'll see you next week after that. All right, let's read Psalm 100.

"A psalm. For giving grateful praise. Shout for joy to the Lord all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God. It is He who made us and we are His. We are His people, the sheep of His pasture. Enter His gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise, give thanks to Him and praise His name, for the Lord is good, and his love endures forever. His faithfulness continues through all generations."

Thanks, everybody. We'll see you next week.

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