

Psalms For The Winter Blues

Songs of Hope and Praise

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Given 07-Jan-12; Sermon #1082

Here in the Carolinas, as most of you who listen in regularly have heard us say when we get up here to speak, “It’s another beautiful day in the Carolinas.” And it really has been a beautiful day. We have had some beautiful days here over this past several weeks. But you would not expect it, because here it is January! November, December, and January are supposed to be fairly cold months. But, the late autumn and early winter have been pretty mild here this year—moderately warm, and often sunny.

Until about last week or so, it was possible to leave your jacket at home. I saw some people in shorts and short sleeve shirts in December! That is radical to me. I think December wear would be a parka, or at least a nice flannel shirt. But I have seen kids out there playing soccer in their shorts and short sleeve shirts. And I get a chill down my spine.

This past week has actually been pretty chilly. One night it dove into the high teens and low 20s, depending upon where you were, and the days were cold and windy, and a bit of rain. It was pretty miserable. But yesterday, Beth had the front door open along with a couple of windows. She had been doing a fair amount of cooking, and so she opened it up a bit. But, those doors and windows stayed open until past 6 pm when it finally started to get a bit chilly in the house.

Well, that same cold front that went through about a week ago brought snow and freezing temperatures to the northern tier of the country, along with blizzards out on the plains; rain and snow in the Pacific Northwest; and California was basking in 85° temperatures.

But even so, because it is the time of year that it is—early January now—we are mentally preparing for cold, wet weather, with several long weeks of steady overcast gray days. I know in Chicago they are. I used to live there. And it was gray from September to May, it seems. I am sure the sun poked through a bit every once in a while, but it sure seemed to be so very gray during those fall and winter months while we were living up there.

And we can only hope and pray that because this winter started off so well, maybe it will be a mild one. But, we still have that thing back in our minds that the wintertime is not the best time. It is the time when we feel cold; the time when the cold winds blows up your pant leg, or skirt. It just makes you feel cold and miserable. You never seem to be able to get warm.

This idea that wintertime is like that—cold and gray—affects some people more than others. Some become depressed during the winter time, especially those who are from the more northern climes where the sun is not up as long, or as high in the sky, and all

that cloud cover. They have symptoms such as sleepiness, where they just cannot seem to get enough sleep. And they have difficulty waking up in the morning, wanting to just crawl back into bed.

Some people, because of this malady, overeat. And this brings on weight gain during the winter. On the other hand, some have a total lack of energy and are listless. They have difficulty concentrating. They have difficulty completing tasks. They approach everything with pessimism, and feelings of hopelessness during these months. Some people get so bad that they will withdraw from friends and family, and any sort of social activity. And a few, sadly, will even take their own lives, just because of the dreariness of it.

Now this condition has a name, as you might expect. It is called, Seasonal Affective Disorder, or SAD for short. This perfectly describes how many of these people feel. In some northern areas of North America and Europe, where we have this climate without a lot of sun exposure during this time, it might lay as many as 10% of the population low for these winter months. A great many of these 10% are women. It appears to affect women more than men. And it may be because women do not tend to get outside as much as men do. But then, it may be gender thing. I am not sure. These are what the stats seem to say.

Physically, scientists believe that SAD affects people because of their lack of exposure to sunlight. Oftentimes, they will suggest spending time under a sun-lamp, or a full-spectrum light therapy. This seems to do wonders for some people because that is what they need.

Sometimes exercising and outdoor activities are proscribed to just get the blood working—chopping wood, or skiing—to get some folks going. They have more energy, and better sense of well being, getting over their symptoms of SAD.

Other scientists believe that while those things may work for a while, SAD is actually the result of a lack of the body chemical serotonin, which is a neurotransmitter that helps to regulate mood, appetite, and sleep. Others say that it might be caused by the overproduction of melatonin, which is produced in darkness. Melatonin helps you go to sleep at night, and increases in you as the sun sets, and you start feeling drowsy, and you fall asleep. Some people take supplemental melatonin before they go to bed, because it helps them to get to sleep better.

Still others place the blame on a lack of vitamin D. You may remember that vitamin D is produced in your body by the exposure of your skin to sunlight. And since we do not get out very much in the wintertime, we are not exposed to the sun, our vitamin D levels drop, and we tend to get depressed.

So, whatever the case, this SAD affects a great many of us. And then we just add on to that not just the gloomy skies and the cold weather, but we have the stresses of work, school, family, church activities, and of course for us one of the great stresses throughout the whole period are all the holidays that we do not like so much from

Psalms for the Winter Blues by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Halloween, to Christmas, to Valentine's Day, all the way to Easter. We are fighting these worldly forces that come at us, and we try to make the best of the time. All of these things happening in the winter months can drag us down.

Just because we are in God's church does not make us immune to these things, as some of you probably know. Some of you have been affected by this seasonal depression to one degree or another. It may just be where you live that contributes to it, because you live in a place that is gloomy a lot, that you might have these periods of glumness and depression.

Now, there is no real way to know from the Bible if the ancients were aware of the correlation of depression and the winter months. I cannot find anything in Scripture that shows that during the winter the Israelites got depressed. But, just like here, winter was the time of year in the land of Israel when it was overcast and gloomy. Normally you think of the land of Israel being in the Middle East in the midst of a desert where it is always sunny and warm. How could anybody be depressed in that? (Some people can, though.)

The land of Israel has a rainy season, being the same as our autumn, winter months, extending from about November to March, and somewhat into May. The height of it is December through February—those months leading up to Passover.

So, in this particular time of the year the skies over the holy land are leaden and gray. The people there, just like here, have to spend much of their time indoors.

When we are down, as members of God's church (and Christians out there in Churchianity too), we often turn to the Psalms to get a bit of a pick-me-up. And I am sure that many of the devout people in ancient Israel did the same thing.

Believe it or not (and this is why I started out this way today), there may be a link between a particular section of the Psalms and this time of year. I suppose you did not know that. And, if we concentrate on these particular psalms, we may get a benefit from them if we feel that we are sliding down into the dumps. These particular psalms may be enough to pick us back up, especially during these winter months when it is gloomy. But at the end of the winter months, we are looking forward to the Passover, because it comes right after the bulk of the rainy season in Israel.

So, what I hope to do in this sermon is to give you meat in due season to help you use the Scripture, particularly this section of the Psalms, to help you through these winter months. Perhaps you can use this to your benefit, especially if you feel like you are beginning to become depressed by the winter.

Please turn to Ephesians 5. I know that in the past seven sermons I have gone to this section of scriptures, and have used it as a jumping off point for the sermons on "Seeking God's Will." I just cannot seem to get away from it. I do not know if reading this particular section of Scripture over the last few months has given me this idea too, but it comes in this section.

As the New King James version head indicates, this is an admonition from Paul to walk in wisdom. Notice what he says:

Ephesians 5:15-17 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

This is where we often stopped in the previous sermons. But notice how Paul goes on. That was not the end of his instruction in walking in wisdom:

Ephesians 5:18-21 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.

This whole section is devoted to admonitions about walking in wisdom. That is, he wants to help us make the best use of our time in these evil days by making right decisions based on what we understand of God's will. So he warns us, also, not to fall into dissipation and excess which things like wine would help us to do, getting us off the track quickly. Do not lean on the crutch of something that is going to make you addicted like wine can. But, instead allow God's Spirit to fill you, and give you purpose, strength, and guidance that you need to walk before God.

Then he gives an entire verse over to urging us to fill our conversation with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. I think that is very interesting. Even though he had been giving little snippets of advice through this, he then takes an entire verse—a long verse at that—to tell us we need to incorporate the Psalms, the hymns, and the spiritual songs into our conversations with one another, which is interesting. "Speaking to one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs." He goes on to say that our inner life, "Singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord," the inner life of your mind, that ongoing conversation that you have with yourself all the time, should also be filled with hymns, songs, and spiritual songs. It is very interesting.

To the apostle Paul, the Psalms were a vital part of the Bible to teach us how to walk in wisdom. Probably, he thought of the Psalms on a much higher level than we do. To him, they were very important to have these hymns and songs going on in the mind at all times. And, not only having them in the mind, but then coming out of us in the way we spoke to one another. It is very interesting.

So, our internal and external speech needs to be populated with words, thoughts, and melodies of these psalms that we learn from God's Word, giving praise and thanksgiving to God first and foremost.

What we see in this section of Ephesians 5:15-21 is a sketch of wise Christian living—walking before God, using our time profitably as we make our way to the Kingdom of God. So, in rough outline Paul gives these instructions:

1. Be alert to what is going on around you.
2. Use your time wisely.
3. Learn God's will.
4. Allow God's Spirit to guide you.
5. Learn, talk about, and meditate on the Psalms and hymns.
6. Be grateful.
7. Submit to one another.

Six of these things we would expect the apostle Paul to tell us, but it is the fifth point, "Learn, talk about, and meditate on the Psalms and hymns," that we might not have put in there ourselves. That one may be the surprising one.

So, perhaps the Psalms are more important than we think. And certainly to the apostle Paul, they were very important.

There may be a practical reason for this, and it is due to the times that they lived in. Copies of the Scriptures were rare in those days. They did not have the scrolls available to them all the time. They did not have books on their laps when they went to services. And if any of them did, they were probably the more wealthy people in the congregation who could afford to have someone actually write out the Scriptures. That would have been very expensive to have done.

So, in order to have these words with them throughout the week between services, the people had to memorize long passages of the Bible so that they could study and meditate on them throughout the week—thinking on these things and learning how to apply them in their lives.

Timothy was a young evangelist that was pastoring some churches, and the apostle Paul advises him in I Timothy 4:13 to give a great deal of time over to reading the Scriptures aloud to the congregation—a public reading of the Scriptures, because they needed to hear them, because they did not have Bibles in their laps to take home. We can suggest to you to go over something, say Matthew 25, or "If you want to learn the outline of prophecy, read Matthew 24." You have a Bible there. Most of you brought one, maybe two. You go home and you may have a shelf full of Bibles. I counted one time all the Bibles I had, and it was going into at least the teens, but I cannot remember now, and I probably have a lot more now too. I seem to collect them over the years. But

I am a preacher. I had better have a few.

We have the Bible readily available to us that they did not. So they absolutely needed the Scriptures read to them, and the ancient peoples had *minds*—not like ours. We tend to be able to dismiss these things, and say, “Well, I can always go back and look it up.” But the ancients did not have that luxury. They seemed to have minds that when they heard something, they would remember it. They would *have* to remember it, because they could not write things down. They did not have paper, or writing utensils, and what did exist was extremely expensive. They had to remember what they heard. So, that is what they did with the Scripture. Paul or Timothy or some other minister had to speak it to them, and they would remember it—they would commit it to memory.

It is here where the Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs come in to play. It is far easier to memorize a passage set to music than it is to hear the plain words. That is why we see so much verse and poetry in the Bible. It is a lot easier to remember a poem than it is remember straight prose.

Here is an example: I bet all of you know Psalm 1 by memory. “Blessed and happy is the man.” Do you know the rest of the words of that song? If you start singing, “Blessed and happy is the man, who does never walk astray, nor with the ungodly men, . . .” you are singing with me are you not? You learned that psalm, and you could probably go on, because in the churches of God we have sung that hymn for a very long time, one of the first our kids learn. We have committed it to memory because there is a tune that goes with it. So we know that song. The Hebrews, and the people of the early church, did the exact same thing. They put Scripture to music, and they were then able to remember it easier. And it stuck with them.

How many of you know, “Holy, Mighty, Majesty”? “The Eternal reigneth high above. . . .” We know that song. How about Psalm 51, most of us probably know that one as well—David’s song of repentance. “In thy loving kindness Lord be merciful to me. . . .”

So, we know these songs. We have practiced doing the same thing that the early church did, but they did it far more extensively than we do—out of necessity. They did not have Bibles to use at home. So, they did a lot more memorizing of songs, hymns, and psalms so that they could remember these principles that we take for granted, knowing that they are in our Bibles and that we can refer to them at any time.

The church probably took some of the melodies of the Psalms sung by the Jews, because a great many of the early Christians were Jews, and so they had them already in memory, and so they are likely to have used them in the church of God as well. We, the Church of the Great God, have done sort of the same thing, but we use the Worldwide Church of God’s old purple hymnal. We are using what has been done in the past, and we are continuing to use it now all these years later, 20 years later from when we came out of the Worldwide Church of God. (As a matter of fact, this week is the anniversary of that event, January 11, 1992. It is hard to believe it has been 20 years.) Even so, we are doing a similar thing that the church of God probably did with the music that the Jews used in their services in the synagogue. We are using melodies that were

Psalms for the Winter Blues by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

handed down to us from the past.

They probably did not do just Old Testament verses. It is likely that they put some of the New Testament teachings they were receiving into music as well. There are a couple of indications of this in Scripture. For instance, I Timothy 3:16 is a kind of doxology or creed:

I Timothy 3:16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory.

This is more like a creed. If this was put to music, and I assume that it probably was to make it easier to memorize, this might have been one of those sections that became a bit of a hymn. There is another one in II Timothy 2:

II Timothy 2:11-13 This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.

This, too, may have been a kind of, at least a poem, and if not, a song that they sang.

There is one more in the book of Jude, found in the last two verses. This is a doxology.

Jude 24-25 Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.

Does that not sound like a hymn that could be sung? This could be a hymn of praise to God.

These are a few indications that this was also done in the early church, putting some of these things to music.

In addition, they also learned many of the Psalms from quotations in the New Testament. Did you know that just under half of the quotations in the New Testament from the Old Testament are from the Psalms? It is 116 quotations out of 263, which is 44%, are from the Psalms.

The writers of the books of the New Testament, knowing that the people knew the Psalms best of all because they most likely sang them most frequently, often used quotations from the Psalms to back up their points that they were making because the people would have readily have known where they were from, known they were

scriptural.

The Levites did the same thing in Old Testament times. Beyond the Psalms, it is clear that many parts of the Old Testament are poetic. And if they are poetic, they have the possibility of being put to music.

We know that many of the Psalms were sung around the temple, and in the services of the temple, and in processions, and on feast days. Actually there were specific psalms that were sung every day. This means that there was a psalm for Sunday, and a psalm for Monday, and a psalm for Tuesday, etc. And, of course, the most important psalm was for the Sabbath. I believe Psalm 92, in the title in my Bible, "A song for the Sabbath day." It would be a good study to figure out why it was the psalm of the Sabbath day.

There were psalms that were sung with the daily sacrifices; there were psalms that were sung doing this, doing that; there was a lot of music that went along with the worship of God in the temple or tabernacle. We know that David organized the Levites into great choirs, and bands. There is one I will tell you about in more detail later where they had huge choirs that spoke back and forth in responsive style of music. It must have been fantastic to hear. Music was a large part of the worship of God.

There are whole books such as Lamentations that are almost entirely in verse; a series of lamentations—songs—a dirge; songs of sorrow. Jeremiah is thought to have put them together, and maybe even wrote them.

The third chapter of Habakkuk is a prayer that could be set to music. As mentioned in my sermons recently, there are two songs of Moses found in Exodus 15, and Deuteronomy 32. Then, there is the song of Deborah in Judges 5, and the prayer of Hannah in I Samuel 2.

And of course, there are many other poetic passages, especially in the prophets. If you look in a modern Bible, and they have them put in verse, you will see large passages of the prophets are in verse. And certainly, the composer Handel found a way to set them to music. If you listen to the *Messiah*, you will memorize great sections of the prophets, especially if they apply to Jesus Christ.

We had one this past feast: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up you everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is the King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts!" Okay, if you want to memorize that, it is part of Psalm 24.

Now, the Psalms themselves have an internal organization that most casual Bible readers miss, although they may notice that when they go through them, that it is marked as Book I, Book II, Book III, and IV, and V. What we have is an organization by fives, and this is part of how the Psalms are presented to us. And there is a reason why it is presented as five books. Now, if the casual reader looks at that and passes on, they miss and cheat themselves of a valuable insight that might help them in their study wherein they might learn and grow. So that basic five-book organization is very important. And the reason is because in Bible numerology the number 5 is associated

with divine grace.

Now the simplified explanation for why the number 5 is associated with grace is that 4 is the number of the earth, and God's creative works in the earth. You can see these things in the four winds, the four corners of the earth, the four seasons, where you can see them in groups of four. So people who have read the Bible come to the conclusion that four tends to come up in these passages that speak about God's physical creativity. So, if four is associated with God's physical works, then four plus one (which is five) means *beyond* the physical, and therefore the number 5 tends to be associated with God's spiritual creation. And the number one factor in God's spiritual creation is grace. Nothing happens in salvation for us apart from His grace. So, four plus one (meaning beyond the physical) is five, which is associated with divine grace.

In Hebrew, the system of gematria which is a fancy word meaning that each letter in Hebrew and Greek is assigned a number. And if you add these numbers up, and they give you a total, and these factors of the total can tell you how they fit into certain things. (This was probably not the best way to explain this). In Hebrew the word for earth—*heretz*—is a multiple of four. But the word for heavens—*hashemahim*—is a multiple of five. Those two words are both found in the first verse of the Bible, "In the beginning God create the heavens [*hashemahim*] and the earth [*haretz*]." So right at the beginning we are introduced to God's grace by way of the idea of gematria.

That might be all well and good, but in Greek, *charis*—grace—is also a multiple of five, which is interesting. *Charis* is the word that Paul uses often for the concept of divine favor and unmerited gift. We can see that in both testaments whether Hebrew or Greek, this remains true.

Now we will see in just one example—I do not want to go into this very deep, because I am speaking about the psalms today, not about grace and the numeral 5—turn to Matthew 25 and we will see this just a bit. And the first thing you see in chapter 25 is the parable of the ten virgins.

Matthew 25:1-2 "Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

Matthew 25:10 "And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.

So we see that five who were wise were given grace and salvation. This is just one of the ways that it is used God's Word, that five has seems to have a divine stamp of showing God's grace.

Luke, in the Parable of the Minas (pounds), remember that He rewarded His servants

with a mina each, and the one who did really well gained 10 more, and the one who did fairly well gained 5 minas—both of these are obviously multiples of five. Those two went into His Kingdom, while the one who did not gain anything, and only had the original mina, was judged and condemned. These are just neat little things where you see the number five pop out alongside the idea of grace and salvation.

In addition, five is the most common factor in the measurements of the tabernacle and the temple. There is also an interesting example that when the Israelites left Egypt, it says in Exodus 13:18 that they went out in orderly ranks. Well, do you know that is not what the Hebrew says? The Hebrew literally says that they went out arrayed by fives. The idea here is that they went out in an orderly way by God's organization—fives—and they were saved. They were brought out of Egypt. The same wording is used in Joshua 1:14; 4:12. In the second case it is Israel crossing the Jordan River and going and inheriting the Promised Land. This is another image of salvation, inheritance, redemption, reward, and grace. It is interesting. This is just a few examples of God's great works and redemptive gifts included in this number five.

This arrangement by fives is not just in the children of Israel leaving Egypt, or crossing the Jordan River, or in the five books of the Psalms. It is throughout the entire Old Testament. If you think about it, there is even more. We have five fingers on each hand. And it is a basic (handy) unit of organization, because it is easy to tick off 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, off the fingers of our hand. So, if you have five of a thing, you can associate them with one of your fingers. It is easy to do.

There are not only five books of the Psalms, there are five books of the Law (the Pentateuch—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). There are also (many of you may not know this) five Festival Scrolls, the Megilloth—Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther. And believe it or not, unlike us who think of things in terms of four seasons in the year (like spring, summer, fall, and winter) Hebrews were likely to split up the sacred year into five parts, according to how the festivals fell each year.

So you have the Passover season in the springtime—Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. Then you have a late spring/early summer season encompassing Pentecost. Then you have the time of hot summer, which they, over time, centered around the 9th of Ab, when the temple fell. Then came the fall feasts between Trumpets and the Last Great Day. Then comes the winter season which, over time, centered on the feast of dedication (Hanukah) and the feast of Purim, which is in the month of Adar, the last month of the Hebrew calendar. So they had the five festival seasons of Passover, Pentecost, Summer, the Fall Festivals, and the Winter. These correspond to these other things (the five festival scrolls).

Now, we will have some fun. Take out a piece of paper and let us make a chart where we put all these things together so we can see how these things correspond to one another. It is going to be a chart of 6 rows by 6 columns. The first five can be maybe about an inch wide, while the last one should be at least two inches or so. The top row is going to be the titles for the columns.

The first column is labeled "Psalms." The second column is labeled "Summary Psalm." The third column is labeled "Pentateuch" (or "Law"). The fourth column is labeled "Megilloth" ("Festival Scrolls"). The fifth column is labeled "Season." And the sixth column, the wide one is labeled "Themes."

Now we are going down and filling in these columns.

Starting on the left with the Book of Psalms, write Book I, Book II, Book III, Book IV, and Book V. That makes it easier to differentiate. And if you have room, add to the first box "1-41." In the second box add "42-72." In the third box add "73-89." In the fourth box add "90-106." And then in the fifth box add "107-150."

Now filling in the rows under Summary Psalm: In the first box, write "146," in the second box, write "147," in the third box, write "148," in the fourth box, write "149," and in the fifth box, write "150."

Now filling in the rows under the Law or Pentateuch, write the first five books of the law in order: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

Now, filling in the rows under Megilloth, or Festival Scrolls, write: Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther.

Now, filling in the rows under Season, remember we had Passover, Pentecost, Summer (9th of Ab), Fall Feasts, and Winter.

Now, the themes are a bit more extensive, and that is why I suggested you make that column a bit wider. The first is, "Christ's Human Life, Sacrifice, Deliverance, and Salvation." The themes of book two are, "Marriage, Law, Covenant, Exile, and Redemption." The themes of book three are, "The Temple, Correction, Tribulation, and Devastation." The third book can be kind of scary. Of course, you remember that this corresponds to the 9th of Ab in the summer, Lamentations, the Book of Leviticus, which is full of laws and temple stuff, so it all goes together. The themes of book four are, "Character, Christ's Return, God Reigns, and Millennium. These are pretty uplifting after the third book, do you not think? And finally, the themes of book five are, "God's Acts and Accomplishments of Salvation."

Psalms for the Winter Blues by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

PSALM	SUMMARY PSALM	LAW	FESTIVAL SCROLLS	SEASON	THEMES
Book I (1-41)	146	Genesis	Song of Songs	Passover	Christ's Human Life; Sacrifice; Deliverance; Salvation
Book II (42-72)	147	Exodus	Ruth	Pentecost	Marriage; Law; Covenant; Exile; Redemption
Book III (73-89)	148	Leviticus	Lamentations	Summer	The Temple; Correction; Tribulation; Devastation
Book IV (90-106)	149	Numbers	Ecclesiastes	Fall Feasts	Character; Christ's Return; God Reigns; Millennium
Book V (107-150)	150	Deuteronomy	Esther	Winter	God's Acts and Accomplishments of Salvation

Now, I could have handed that out to you, but the people who are listening in would not have gotten the hand-out, so I decided just to make everybody make their own. It was probably a good exercise to do it, just to put it into your head a little bit.

I hope you can use this particular chart in the future to do your own studies, and see how the themes relate across this; things like how Exodus relates to the second book of Psalms, while also relating to Ruth, and Pentecost. You can see some of the themes popping up across them. You may just want to read those particular books together. Read Exodus and the second book of Psalms, and Ruth together and see what kind of inspiration you might get, especially at those times (remember we have the season column), of the year. So you might want to read Exodus and Ruth (and the second book of Psalms) during the season of Pentecost. Ruth is especially all about Pentecost. So, it might make some connections that will help you to grow spiritually.

But today, we are interested in the bottom row, because this is winter time, is it not?

Psalms for the Winter Blues by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

And, we want to gain some insight into what we should be thinking about as we go toward the Passover through these gloomy months.

I also want to mention, you may think, “Well, how do Deuteronomy and Esther fit in here? And why are they associated with winter?” There are some good reasons why we can put all these together. It is interesting that the themes of Psalm Book V (from 107 to 150) go along with this. It is really neat.

Deuteronomy, fifth book of the law—do you know when it was written? It was written in the last months just before the children of Israel went over the Jordan River into Canaan—the Promised Land. Do you remember what time of year that was?

We all remember Joshua 5 and the controversy surrounding Pentecost? But the time period they were in (the controversy was about Pentecost because of the Wavesheaf offering that was or was not given at that time); the Wavesheaf offering was given during/at the end of Unleavened Bread time, right? It talks about the men being circumcised right there before Passover. And it was just before all this that Moses had written Deuteronomy and then died. So, the book of Deuteronomy was written in the late winter season just before Passover.

When were the events of the book of Esther? It does not necessarily say, but the conclusion of Esther, which events were all leading up to, also occurred during the winter, and they marked it forever for the Jewish people with the Festival of Purim.

And remember, Purim is celebrated between the 13th and the 15th of Adar, which is the last month of the year, which again is right before Passover. So, the book of Esther has to do with this time period as well.

Now it is interesting that the book of Deuteronomy gives us all of these wonderful instructions about how we should act in the land. So, it is given to us just before we go—where? Into the Promised Land, into the Kingdom of God. The book of Esther celebrates God’s salvation of His people in Persia. We have very similar themes about this salvation period that we are in the midst of. As we go through this, I hope you will be able to see this.

We see in the chart that the theme of this last book of psalms is God’s triumph in accomplishing salvation. So, in seeing this triumph of God accomplishing salvation—what we should see in Book V of the Psalms is uplifting, hopeful messages. And that is what we see there! The psalms in this last book from 107-150 tend to be very positive. They are songs of praise and thanksgiving, of exaltation of God, of amazement at the wonderful works that He did on our behalf to bring about salvation. Sometimes it is deliverance—physical deliverance. But, physical deliverance is just the physical counterpart to spiritual salvation.

And so, we see here that there is something ahead of us that is great, and that God is working, and He never fails. Guess where “His Mercy Never Fails,” appears in the book of psalms? Book V.

I told you that Psalm 150 is a summary for all of Book V. So, let us go and read it. Psalm 150 is simply a “Hallelujah” from start to finish. This may have been one of those psalms that were sung by competing choirs, where one choir would just simply sing the word, “Hallelujah!” while the other choir would fill in with the next bit.

Psalm 150:1-6 Praise the LOORD! Praise God in His sanctuary; praise Him in His mighty firmament! Praise Him for His mighty acts; praise Him according to His excellent greatness! Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet; praise Him with the lute and harp! Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes! Praise Him with loud cymbals; praise Him with clashing [high sounding] cymbals! Let everything that has breath praise the LOORD. Praise the LOORD!

This is the theme of Book V. It is this uplifting, hopeful, exultant, “We did it! It happened! Everything worked out!” We see here that only in one place in this psalm is there a reason for all this exultation. That is in verse 2, “Praise Him for His mighty acts.” That is the theme. Praise Him for His mighty acts. And what we see is a great uplifting, faith-building section of scripture where we are forced to look at what He has done, and it is all good. It all works out. So we can have this wonderful, joyous feeling of praise and thanks for what God has done.

So, God is working to bring salvation, and we are assured here that His excellent greatness (as in verse 2) will make it happen.

Let us go back to Deuteronomy 3 and see something that fits, which is referenced in my margin here in Psalm 150:2, where Moses is speaking to God when he had been told he could not enter the land. Notice what Moses says in response:

Deuteronomy 3:24 O Lord Good, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your mighty hand, for what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do anything like Your works and Your mighty deeds?

Hallelujah!

You can see there is a link there just in this one particular theme, this one verse, that as Moses was about to die, this was on his mind. Even though God had said, “No, you can’t go into the land,” he was praising God for all the mighty works that He had done, and that He was going to work things out, and how excellent and wonderful He is.

Normally in each one of these books of the Psalms, the first psalm sets the theme. Turn to Psalm 107, and we will touch on that. We cannot go into all of it; we do not have enough time today. But, I do want to read a portion of it, and see how these themes pop up here.

Psalms for the Winter Blues by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Psalm 107:1-3 Oh, give thanks to the LOORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. Let the redeemed of the LOORD say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy, and gathered out of the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

You see that he leaves no area untouched here. God has done the work of gathering His redeemed from everywhere.

Psalm 107:4-9 They wandered in the wilderness in a desolate way; they found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried out to the LOORD in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses. And He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city for a dwelling place [which Abraham was looking for]. Oh, that men would give thanks to the LOORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! For He satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness.

So, we can see here in the first 9 verses that the themes are announced immediately. This is what this Book V is all about. The first verse uses the Old Testament equivalent of *charis*—grace. Remember, this is the fifth book, and the first verse that opens up the fifth book talks about God's grace. That Hebrew word is (*c*)*hesed*, the Old Testament word for grace, which is the word translated mercy in this first verse, often translated as loving kindness, steadfast love, faithfulness, goodness, and even devotion. All of these ideas are rolled up into the New Testament concept of grace. And so, this Book V opens up with, "God's grace lasts for ever! Through all eternity! And the redeemed have access to it!"

The next verses talk about deliverance, and salvation, and God's works of goodness, and salvation. And I think verse 9 is incredible where He talks about God fills that empty spot in the human heart, that He satisfies the longing in the human heart for salvation and eternity. He has done it. His works have accomplished the complete transformation of man into God! The divine purpose has been accomplished. That is what He is saying in Book V. "It will work! It *is* coming to pass! It may take a while, you may be going through tribulation right now, whatever that happens to be. You may be down and depressed because of the winter, but God's plan is going to come to pass. And it will all work."

No wonder Psalm 150 says hallelujah about 19 times.

There are many songs of praise in this section. Beyond the final five, we read one of them, Psalm 146 through 150 are all about praising God.

Book V has Psalms 113 to 118 which are a group named the Hallel, which is simply the songs of praise. In these psalms you will find a lot of "Praise the Lord's" and "His mercy endures forever." These psalms were used extensively during the holy day seasons,

Psalms for the Winter Blues by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

and they were sung during pilgrimages to Jerusalem. Psalm 136 is called the Great Hallel, the Great Psalm of Praise. This one is the one where they know that there were two great choirs singing. The one great choir simply sang, "His mercy endures forever." And the way this went was as if I split the congregation in half, and this side sings, "Oh give thanks to the Lord for He is good," and the other side would respond, singing, "For His mercy endures forever." Then the first side would sing, "Oh give thanks to the God of gods," and the other side would sing, "For His mercy endures forever." And they would continue going through this stacking up all of God's wonderful acts, one on top of another, understanding that this is part of His grace. His mercy—His *chesed*—endures forever!

It is really an incredible psalm! I was ecstatic when we picked hymn number 104 to sing today, because it is Psalm 138.

Lord, I will praise Thee with my whole heart. I'll sing all Thy praises before all the gods. Worship and bow toward Thy holy place, praising Thy Name for Thy kind love so true. More than Thy Name Thy Word is enlarged. And when I cried in that day, Thou didst hear. Thou strengthened me with Thy strength, oh Lord. Kings of the earth will then hear, praising Thee. Yes, they shall hear, oh Lord, of Thy ways. Then shall they sing for Thy glory is great. Though God is high, the poor He respects, but strikes the proud down from His sovereign height. Though in the midst of trouble I walk, [remember the theme, it is wintertime, possibly down and depressed] Thou will preserve with Thy right hand my life. Thou wilt fulfill Thy purpose for me. Thy steadfast love [*chesed*] will endure for ever more."

Incredible!

I did not ask Bill to choose that hymn today. I think it was just wonderful that we have that once again helping us to understand.

You may think, "Psalm 119—that is in this section, is it not?" Well, would you not know, it is all about God's wonderful works! And, the law that we often pigeonhole it as—a song about the law—the author is telling us that it is the law that brings us to this salvation! It is our guide, it is our help. Look at the final section of it, and listen to the theme come out.

Psalm 119:169-176 Let my cry come before You, O LORD; give me understanding according to Your word. Let my supplication come before You; deliver me according to Your word. My lips shall utter praise, for You teach me Your statutes. My tongue shall speak of Your word, for all Your commandments are righteousness. Let Your hand become my help, for I have chosen Your precepts. I long for Your salvation, O LORD, and Your law is my delight. Let my soul live, and it shall praise You; and let Your judgments help me. I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant, for I do not forget Your commandments.

These same ideas keep popping up again and again.

The next 15 psalms, 120 through 134 are called the Psalms of Degrees, or Psalms of Assents. They are said to have been sung on the way up to Jerusalem on pilgrimage to keep the feasts, or perhaps they corresponded to the 15 steps from the court of women up to the court of Israel. And perhaps they sang one of these psalms on each of these steps as they went up to the temple.

They are really interesting in how they fit in with this theme, and all the different things that are brought up. This is the same section where it says, "The Lord builds the house, and unless He does it, the weary build in vain." And so you get some of these ideas coming in that God works through all these things to bring us to salvation.

Let us conclude in Psalm 145. This one is actually the last psalm in this section since Psalms 146 through 149 are summary songs for the earlier books. Well, then this is the second to the last, since 150 is the final summary psalm. But, this psalm brings the themes together. I want you to hear it.

Psalm 145:1-4 I will extol You, my God, O King; and I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever. Great is the LOORD, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise Your works to another. . . .

How can that happen unless we were all there at once? What is he talking about here? He is talking about the Kingdom of God.

Psalm 145:4-7 and shall declare Your mighty acts. I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, and on Your wondrous works. Men shall speak of the might of Your awesome acts, and I will declare Your greatness. They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness, and shall sing of Your righteousness.

It is almost as if David could not think of words high enough to express what He thought about God.

Psalm 145:8-21 The LOORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The LOORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works. All Your works shall praise You, O LOORD, and Your saints shall bless You. They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom, and talk of Your power, to make known to the sons of men His mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of His kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations. The LOORD upholds all who fall,

Psalms for the Winter Blues by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

and raises up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look expectantly to You, and You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing. The LOORD is righteous in all His ways, gracious in all His works. The LOORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them. The LOORD preserves all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy. My mouth shall speak the praise of the LOORD, and all flesh shall bless His holy name forever and ever.

What a slam, bang ending to this book! This psalm brings all these themes together, encapsulating all the faith, and hope, and glory of God in these 21 verses. How can anyone be depressed after reading this?

So when you are feeling down this winter, or at any other time, perhaps you might turn back to Book V of the psalms, because it tells us that as dark as things may be now, life goes on, and God's salvation will appear. As Herbert W. Armstrong used to say, "We win!" And in this attitude of hope, and praise, and thanksgiving, we can then enter the Passover season with joy.