

## Psalms: A Legacy of Beauty and Spiritual Guidance

There's a reason that the Book of Psalms in the Old Testament has been a favorite for more than 2500 years. It's a stellar collection! Many of the compositions are brilliant poetry. The concepts that they present and the issues they raise are universal and profound, and the emotional effect they have on their readers, ranging from despair to comfort to inspiration, can be very powerful.

Our study will begin with an overview: the structure of the book, its history, its language, common literary structures of the individual compositions, and the types of poems.

Then we'll dive into the theological and philosophical issues that the Psalms raise. Looking at individual Psalms and comparing one to another, we'll discuss their views about: the place of humanity in the universe, conceptions of God and the relationship between God and humanity, what happens when we die, the great Temple in Jerusalem, complaint, praise and gratitude as spiritual practices, nature images, wisdom and advice, and history.

I've been a musician all my life, so along the way we'll listen to music inspired by and written on the texts of the Psalms. I'll rely on people in the class to recommend their favorite compositions to add to my contributions. And always we'll enjoy the eloquent complexity and elegance of the poetry.

I've been reading, singing, studying and translating Psalms for a long time, but for me the main reason for teaching them is to hear others' take on them. I'll have a definite agenda, but within that framework there will be lots of time for class discussion. I promise to exercise teacher's authority to keep us more or less on topic!

If you plan to take the course, I urge you to attend the first session and hear basic background. Though each session thereafter will stand on its own, there will be a lot of cross-referencing. Bring your text, though I'll also provide my own translations for most of the Psalms. The King James Version is beautiful, but the knowledge of ancient Semitic languages that has come to light since its creation has made its translations out-of-date.

English translations that I think are mostly accurate are *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, *The New American Bible*, and *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* by Robert Alter. If you want to have Hebrew text in front of you I recommend the JPS or the Koren edition of the *TaNaKh* (Old Testament).

I look forward to studying with you.

**Leader:** Rabbi Bob Freedman has been a professional classical singer, cantor, teacher, and congregation leader who has sung, taught, and translated the Psalms for many years.

**Wednesdays:** 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., 8 weeks: October 16 through December 4 (no class on 11/27)

**Location:** PSRC, Maximum 22 seats