

# OpenTheo

## December 15th: Psalms 111 & 112 & Revelation 7

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Two paired psalms. The sealing of the 144,000.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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## Transcript

Psalm 111 Psalm 111 is a confession of the Lord. It is an acrostic or alphabetical psalm, with each of its lines beginning with a successive letter of the alphabet. The adoption of this poetic device has a number of different effects.

First of all, it makes the psalm very suitable for memorization. It gives the psalm a sense of completeness. This is the A to Z of the glory of God.

Furthermore, it is a great way to express the truth of the Lord. It is a great way to express the truth of the Lord. It is a great way to express the truth of the Lord.

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It is a great way to express the truth of the Lord It invites a greater degree of creativity, and certain associations that you might not have found otherwise, alongside more common forms of expression. There are some arresting statements that the psalmist might not have given us had he not been invited to do so by the structure that he has chosen. One can imagine such a psalm serving an important purpose for memorization for younger children.

In memorising this psalm, the hearer is being taught to cover the full spectrum of God's works and character, and the comprehensive character implied by the acrostic form would invite deeper reflection upon why exactly this was a more comprehensive statement. The opening statement of the psalm is not actually part of the acrostic form. Praise the Lord introduces both this and the following psalm, a psalm which is clearly paralleled with it in a number of respects.

The psalmist addresses the whole of his being to the Lord. He gives thanks with his whole heart. However, in this psalm of confession, he is addressing not just his own soul or addressing the Lord, he is addressing the whole company about the glory of God.

He does so in the company of the upright, in the congregation. It is possible that the congregation in view here is not so much the religious gathering of the people in worship in the temple, but a political gathering of people enacting justice within the land. He speaks of the greatness of the works of the Lord.

These works are to be reflected upon, to be studied, as means of delight. The works of the Lord are not just signs of his power, they are means by which his people are instructed. They are signs yielding understanding.

They are spurs to love and trust and dependence. They manifest the Lord's character, a character that endures. Consequently, even centuries after these great acts have been performed, they are fruitful for meditation and reflection.

They teach us about the one who performed them. His work is full of splendor and majesty, and the righteousness that he displayed in them is an enduring characteristic. It is something that does not cease.

As his people meditate upon his great deeds in the past, they will always have recourse to his faithfulness and righteousness. The grace and mercy of the Lord described here would draw our minds back to the way that God described himself and the Theophany at Sinai. The great acts of the Exodus were not merely acts of power.

They were acts that displayed the Lord's character and his gracious disposition towards his people. For this and other reasons, the people of Israel were constantly recalled to the events of the Exodus to reflect upon what God had done for them in order to

understand who God was. In verses 5 and 6, the psalmist continues to reflect upon God's works in history.

In the Exodus in particular, he provided food for those who fear him. God gave quail to his people in the wilderness. And the psalmist, in his typical move, connects this directly with the character of God.

God remembers his covenant forever. In reflecting upon the historical action of God, we can learn something about his enduring character. Beyond the wonders of what God did for his people in the wilderness, he also displayed his power and gracious providence in giving them a land, an inheritance of the nations.

In verse 7, the psalmist makes a surprising move. From speaking of the faithfulness and justice of the works of the Lord's hands, he moves to his precepts. Just as his works are faithful and just, so is his work of commanding his people.

Those are no less trustworthy than the works of his hands. The precepts have been established and they endure in the same way as the Lord's righteousness. His remembering of his covenant forever, which is given in verse 5, is paralleled with his commanding of his covenant forever in verse 9. The renown of his name established in the greatness of his deeds calls for a corresponding, a fitting response from his people as they glorify and magnify it.

The psalm ends with a paradigmatic statement of wisdom. All of the books of wisdom in scripture trace wisdom back to the fear of the Lord. Here, as the end of this psalm returns us to its beginning, we are called to praise the Lord as the beginning of wisdom.

It is through meditating upon the great works of God that understanding is gained. We learn something about God's character and as we learn of God's character, we begin to fear him. And as we will see in the psalm that follows, this is a source of corresponding understanding and character in the worshipper.

Just as the Lord remembers his covenant forever, so his people should remember the covenant that he has commanded forever. In such reverence of the Lord is wisdom found. Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endures forever.

Light dawns in the darkness for the upright. He is gracious, merciful and righteous. It is well with the man who deals generously and lends, who conducts his affairs with justice.

For the righteous will never be moved. He will be remembered forever. He is not afraid of bad news.

His heart is firm, trusting in the Lord. His heart is steady, he will not be afraid, until he looks in triumph on his adversaries. He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor.

His righteousness endures forever. His horn is exalted in honour. The wicked man sees it and is angry.

He gnashes his teeth and melts away. The desire of the wicked will perish. Psalm 112 begins with the same statement that Psalm 111 begins with.

It also takes up the baton from the psalm that preceded it. The final line of that psalm began with the statement that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Now at the start of this psalm, we begin with the man who fears the Lord in such a manner.

He delights in the commandments of the Lord, returning us to the theme with which the previous psalm ended. It makes a great deal of sense to read this as a companion to the preceding psalm. Perhaps most noteworthy of the associations between the two psalms is the fact that back to back there are two acrostic or alphabetical psalms, each going through all of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

Psalm 111 declares the fear of the Lord, his great deeds and his enduring character. Psalm 112 declares the character of the man who fears the Lord in this manner. The two are companions.

The one tells the character of God, the second the character of the godly. The perfection of God's character displayed in the acrostic form is mirrored in the character of the upright man. The message of the psalm perhaps is that this is what the true imaging of God looks like.

This is what it looks like when people act as sons of God. Beyond the shared fundamental structure, the thematic associations between the psalms and certain common expressions, the placing of these two psalms alongside each other invites us to look for deeper parallels, to see how we might map the one onto the other and through that gain understanding. Engaging in such reflection, Gordon Wenham writes, Both the righteousness of God and that of the righteous endure forever.

Both are gracious and merciful. While God remembers his covenant forever and makes his works to be remembered, the righteous will be remembered forever. Like God's precepts, the heart of the righteous is established or steady.

Apart from these close verbal parallels, there are other parallel ideas. Whereas God provides food for those who fear him, the righteous has distributed freely he has given to the poor. The Lord has sent redemption to his people so that the righteous looks in triumph on his adversaries.

The trustfulness of the godly man in 112 verses 7 and 8 answers to the trustworthiness of Jehovah in 111 verses 7 and 8. The message of the psalm more generally might remind us of Psalm 1. It begins with the blessedness of the man who fears the Lord, who meditates upon the Lord's commandments, and it ends with the fate of the wicked. The

righteous man within this psalm reflects the Lord, not just in his righteousness, but also in the way that he uses his might. The righteous man here is one who has wealth and riches.

God's works are full of splendour and majesty. The second half of verse 4 in both psalms parallels the graciousness and the mercy of the Lord and the righteous man. Both of them use their might to lift up others.

The Lord's provision of food at the beginning of verse 5 in Psalm 111 is paralleled with the generosity of the righteous man at the beginning of verse 5 in 112. The Lord's precepts are established forever, and the heart of the righteous man is steady. The most noteworthy parallel is found in the second half of verse 3. In both cases, the righteousness of the person in question endures forever.

The picture of the righteous man that emerges here is not just one in which he shares moral traits with the Lord, but one in which he is lifted up because of his faithfulness and is given to express might like the Lord, a might that is graciously used to save and lift up others. If God is on the side of the needy and the oppressed, so are the godly. Power is here presented as something that can be very positive.

The person with power can employ it in a way that is like the way that the Lord acts with might in the world, reflecting both his power and authority and his character. The blessed and the wise man is here seen primarily in the way that he blesses and gives to others. This man is not built up merely for his own benefit.

He is someone that benefits everyone around him. Everyone is better off for having such a person in their society. Meanwhile, the wicked are frustrated by such a person.

They are made angry by seeing his success. They will perish and their schemes and plans will fail, but the righteous man will be established. A question to consider.

Holding Psalms 111 and 112 alongside each other, what further parallels can you see? How might these parallels deepen our understanding of the meaning of the two Psalms? Revelation chapter 7 Revelation chapter 7 12,000 from Gad 12,000 from the tribe of Asher 12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000 from the tribe of Simeon 12,000 from the tribe of Levi 12,000 from the tribe of Issachar 12,000 from the tribe of Zebulon 12,000 from the tribe of Joseph 12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed. After this I looked and behold a great multitude that no one could number from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying, Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and

thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God for ever and ever.

Amen. Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come? I said to him, Sir, you know. And he said to me, These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation.

They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple. And he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more. The sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and He will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Six seals have already been opened. In chapter 7 of Revelation we are expecting the seventh to be opened right away, but it is not opened yet. Before it can be opened the righteous have to be sealed.

Sealing here is a response to the martyrs. The sealed persons will make up the complete number that is spoken of in chapter 6 verse 11. Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

The chapter opens with four angels standing at the four corners. As they are standing at the four corners of the earth, the land of Israel in particular, this might perhaps be associated with the altar. The altar, which represents the land, has one horn at each corner.

They are holding back the four winds of the earth, which might remind us again of the four living creatures and the four horsemen of the preceding chapter. The winds of the spirit that shake up the land in judgment are prevented from taking their effect until the people have been sealed. This is a Passover type event.

The judgment upon the firstborn is coming. Israel is God's firstborn son, as we see in Exodus chapter 4, and God is marking his people out before the destroying angels are set loose. In verse 2 we see that the four angels are the ones that have been given power to harm the earth and the sea.

These are the destroyers, the ones that are going to come and as it were kill the firstborn. Just as blood was put on the doorposts and on the lintel, the spared firstborn need to be marked out on their foreheads. The forehead might be associated with the lintel.

It might also be associated with the mark of the high priest, who had holy to the Lord, on

a special plate that was put upon his forehead. The hero of this passage might also recall Ezekiel chapter 9, another passage talking about judgment upon Jerusalem and the preparation of certain people within the city before that judgment fell. In Ezekiel chapter 9 there are six men bringing judgment, perhaps corresponding to the six seals that have already been opened, and then a seventh man who seals people before the judgment falls.

Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub on which it rested to the threshold of the house. Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub on which it rested to the Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub on which it rested to the threshold of the house. Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub on which it rested to the threshold of the house.

Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub on which it rested to the outpouring of your wrath on Jerusalem. Then he said to me, The guilt of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great. The land is full of blood, and the city full of injustice.

For they say, The Lord has forsaken the land, and the Lord does not see. As for me, my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity. I will bring their deeds upon their heads.

And behold, the man clothed in linen, with the writing case at his waist, brought back words, saying, I have done as you commanded me. In Revelation chapter 7 we're seeing the same pattern of events more or less playing out. Judgment is held back and restrained until the faithful remnant are marked out.

And then, at that point, the judgment can fall. In verses 4-8 we're given the list of those who are sealed. And there are a few things to notice about this list.

First, it is a perfected number. It's 12 x 12 x 10 x 10 x 10. This is a vision of a complete and perfected number of Israelites, with each tribe fully represented.

The omission of Ephraim and Dan, and the inclusion of Joseph and Levi, is perhaps surprising to many readers. Likewise, the ordering of the tribes might also surprise us. It exhibits some elements of order.

For instance, it begins with Judah, the leading tribe, and it ends with Benjamin, both the last born, and the other Judahite and royal tribe. Benjamin and Joseph are also next to each other, as the two sons of Rachel. But as we go through the rest of the list, it seems that there is no rhyme nor reason to it.

There are many different orderings of the tribes in scripture, according to different principles. Sometimes it's according to birth order, sometimes according to their mothers, as we see in Genesis chapter 46. On occasion, such an order classes children of the handmaids together, sometimes separately from each other, associating them rather

with one of the sisters, Leah or Rachel, to whom the handmaids belonged.

Sometimes the tribes are listed more according to their position in the land. In Numbers chapter 2, the tribes are ordered around the camp. In Ezekiel chapter 48, verses 30-35, the order is that of the gates of the city.

And here we should notice, Joseph is included as a tribe in his own right. Levi is also included. Ephraim and Manasseh are not mentioned.

These shall be the exits of the city. On the north side, which is to be 4,500 cubits by measure, three gates, the gate of Reuben, the gate of Judah, and the gate of Levi, the gates of the city being named after the tribes of Israel. On the east side, which is to be 4,500 cubits, three gates, the gate of Joseph, the gate of Benjamin, and the gate of Dan.

On the south side, which is to be 4,500 cubits by measure, three gates, the gate of Simeon, the gate of Issachar, and the gate of Zebulun. On the west side, which is to be 4,500 cubits, three gates, the gate of Gad, the gate of Asher, and the gate of Naphtali. The circumference of the city shall be 18,000 cubits, and the name of the city from that time on shall be, The Lord is There.

Austin Farrer identifies a crucial clue in the ordering of the gates in Revelation chapter 21, verses 12 to 13. It had a great high wall with 12 gates, and at the gates 12 angels, and on the gates the names of the 12 tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed. On the east, three gates, on the north, three gates, on the south, three gates, and on the west, three gates.

The list in chapter 7 is ordered not by compass directions, but by sides of the camp. It moves from the east to the north to the south to the west. In Ezekiel chapter 48, the senior tribes of Leah are to the north, the tribes of Rachel to the east, the junior tribes of Leah to the south, and the tribes of the handmaids to the west.

If we order the tribes as gates to the sides of the city, starting with the corner gates and working accordingly, we get four similar groupings. There's a senior and a junior group of Leah tribes, a group associated with the handmaids, and a group associated with Rachel. Working from the leading tribe, which is Judah who faces towards the east, oriented towards the rising of the sun, we get the following order, following clockwise.

Judah, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Benjamin, Manasseh, Naphtali, Hasher, Gad, and Reuben. Working by corners, we get the following order. There's a group of Leah tribes, led by Judah, Reuben, and Simeon.

Junior Leah tribes come next, Levi, Issachar, and Zebulun. Then Rachel tribes, Joseph, Benjamin, and Manasseh, followed by the handmaids' children, Naphtali, Hasher, and Gad. This will help us to understand the omission of certain ones and the inclusion of others.



It is the same group as we see in Ezekiel chapter 48, except that Manasseh has taken the place of Dan. In Ezekiel, Dan was with the group of Rachel tribes, but here Manasseh takes his place. Joseph gets the double portion in Ephraim and Manasseh.

In this list, Ephraim is the leading of the two tribes, can be exchanged for Joseph more appropriately. Joseph is represented most of all in Ephraim. Manasseh is included to fill up the double portion and to include three natural descendants of Rachel, making up a full complement of Rachel tribes to go alongside the Junior Leah tribes, the Senior Leah tribes, and the Handmaid tribes.

Another contrast with the listing of the tribes in Ezekiel is the fact that Levi has been demoted to the Junior Leah tribes. Levi no longer has the same significance in the New Covenant, and now Simeon has taken his place. This sealed group then represents the full complement of Israel.

It should be seen as the full measure of Jewish Christians that are saved prior to the judgment upon Jerusalem in AD 70. The judgment is held back until this group is marked out. Following this, we see another group, a multitude that no one can number.

This however is not a group of Israelites. This group is from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages. They are clothed in white robes, possibly the same robes that were given to the martyrs under the altar in the preceding chapter.

Now that the faithful Israelites have been sealed, the full complement of the saved can be brought together, and this great multitude includes both the souls who are beneath the altar and also the faithful Gentile Christians that have suffered during that period. Later on in this chapter they are described as those who have come through the tribulation. We should perhaps understand this as a reference to all the suffering of the martyrs from the between the altar and the temple.

They have been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb. They have washed their robes in His blood. Thinking back to the book of Genesis chapter 49 verse 11, this might recall royal themes.

He has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes. These are the people of the Lion of the tribe of Judah. They are also a priestly company who have been cleansed by the blood of sacrifice.

In Matthew chapter 23 we get a sense of the destruction of Jerusalem as being a comprehensive judgment upon the whole old order, stretching back to the very dawn of time in Abel and his blood that was shed by Cain. All of the blood of the righteous will come upon this city. The great multitude gather together in worship.

They are clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands. Perhaps the themes of the Feast of Tabernacles come out here. And they lead the greater assembly in praise

as they say salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

The angels who are assembled all around respond to them. They are now leading the angels in their worship. They are also spoken of as attaining God's full salvation in anticipation of the new heavens and the new earth that is yet to arrive at the end of the book.

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more. The sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

This is language that we associate with chapters 21 and 22, but it is found here anticipating what will come later. This is, as it were, a first harvest. Peter Lighthouse also suggests in here that we might hear the echoes of Ezekiel chapter 37.

The response of John to the elder here is similar to the response that Ezekiel makes to the Lord in Ezekiel chapter 37 verse 3. In response to the question that he is asked, John says, Sir, you know. In response to the question that Ezekiel is asked by the Lord, Ezekiel responds, O Lord God, you know. In both cases, there is the description of the raising up of a great company.

A question to consider, is there any significance to be seen in the location of the company of the multitude in verse 15?