

Old Testament Spirituality Expressed Through the Psalms

The Psalms express the full range of Old Testament Spiritualities but within the traditional contexts for prayer of Praise, Petition, Thanksgiving and Adoration.



1. **Abrahamic** Covenant Ps.105:6-15
“He remembers his covenant forever ..
Which he concluded with Abraham”
This is a hymn of thanksgiving and
praise to God for all his gifts and
benefits
2. **The Mosaic** Covenant Ps.78: 5-8
“He established a law in Israel, he commanded our ancestors
to hand it down”
3. **The Davidic** Covenant Ps. 110
“Royal dignity has been yours from the day of your birth”
4. The Covenant of **the Heart** Ps.51:10
“Create for me a clean heart, a pure spirit within me”

However, when reading the psalms it becomes readily apparent that the worshippers assumed earthly advantages and protection from enemies, either as individuals or for the nation as a whole. It is a spirituality based on a notion of God as Yahweh Sabaoth, God of Hosts, Victorious in battle.

- Ps.3 “You strike all my foes across the face .. On your people a blessing”
- Ps. 84 “He gives grace and glory and refuses nothing good to those whose life is blameless”
- Ps. 89 “Yours is a strong arm ..You are the flower of their strength, by your favour our strength is triumphant”
- Ps. 142 “I pour out my worry in his presence .. Rescue me from my persecutors”

Our Catholic Faith Prayer and Spirituality 2010-2011

2. Old Testament Spirituality



1. What Are The Key Elements of Old Testament Spirituality?
2. Discuss How the Different Covenants Affected the Spirituality of the Hebrews, Israelites and Jews.
3. Does Old Testament Spirituality Differ Significantly From Your Own?

The Essence of Old Testament Spirituality

If we understand spirituality as the ongoing means by which a meaningful relationship with God is established and maintained, then Old Testament (O.T.) spirituality really consists of a series of spiritualities. However, at the core of them all are the Covenants or agreements made between God and the Hebrews as his chosen people.

It is very important to appreciate that these spiritualities arose as the result of **God's initiative**, not that of any human being. Further, they are not initiatives revealed by prophetic statements but by **personal interventions by God himself** in human, specifically Hebrew and Jewish, history.



This revelation of God in the O.T. is directed towards a perfect communication of **God to humanity**. But, as Christians we realise that this revelation is not, in fact, perfected until the coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ - all Old Testament spiritualities lead to him.

Key Aspects About O.T. Spirituality

1. God's revelation, and hence the spirituality that accompanies it, **develops and changes** over time as circumstances change.
2. It is never an individual spirituality, even when covenants are made with individuals, but a **community spirituality**.
3. The pragmatic concerns of the spirituality are **for the present**, as there is no appreciation of an afterlife in most of the O.T.

The Major Covenants

1. The Covenant with **Abraham**, a promise for a people and for a country (Gen.15 and 17). So, the history of the Hebrews is one based on promise and fulfilment and can be seen in the

- Patriarchal stories of the Book of Genesis
2. The Mosaic Covenant of the **Law**, made at Sinai, with the whole people. (Ex. 24 & 34). This is a direct result of the Exodus event. For the Jews this forms the basis of a spirituality that is understood as being active in the present not in the past.
 3. The David Covenant of **eternal Kingship** (2 Sam.7) that would provide the basis of the Messianic hope.
 4. The Exilic Covenant of **the Heart** (Jer. 31 & Ezek. 36). The loss of the Kingdom caused a deep reflection by the Jews on the nature of their spiritual relationship with God. They came to recognise that God could not be at fault but that their own spirituality had strayed from that desired by God - they had failed to keep to their side of the Covenant commitments. From this time, a new spirituality began to grow, one based on love and proper inner dispositions although, as we see with the Pharisees, this was not universally recognised or adopted.



It can be seen that each spirituality is only really genuine and valued in its lived response to God. If there is no such response, and no proper attitude, then we can ask is there a genuine spirituality? The lessons of Jewish history in the O.T. are lessons for us today.

The Pragmatic Side of Old Testament Spirituality.

There was no belief in an afterlife as we understand it in the O.T. Only in the later Books of Maccabees (2 Macc.12) and Daniel (Dn. 12) does such belief develop. For the Hebrews, Israelites and Jews, obeying and worshipping God would **result in material benefits here on earth**.