

# Psalm - Introduction & Background

## Title

The Hebrew title of the book is *Sepher Tehillim* or "Book of Praises." This title is appropriate given the fact that nearly all of the Psalms include the language of praise to God. The LXX entitles the book *Psalmoi* ("a song sung to the accompaniment of a plucked instrument") or *Psalterium* ("collection of songs"). The Latin title *Liber Psalmorum* or "Book of Psalms" is derived from the LXX title. Similarly, the English title "Psalter" or "Psalms" comes from the LXX.

## Authorship

As indicated on the following chart, the Book of Psalms is an anthology or a collection of Psalms composed by different authors (72:20).

Of the book's 116 superscriptions furnishing a title, 101 of them identify these authors. Some of the superscriptions attributing authorship of the Psalms to David also reveal information about the setting of his various Psalms. These individual settings are captured on the following chart.

Psalm	Samuel	Superscription
3	2 Sam 15:18	When David fled from his son Absalom
7	1 Sam 23:23-24	A <i>shiggaion</i> of David, which he sang to the Lord concerning Cush, a Benjamite
18	2 Sam 18	He sang to the Lord the words of this song when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul
34	1 Sam 21:10-15	When he pretended to be insane before Ahimelech, who drove him away, and he left
51	2 Sam 11-12	When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba
52	1 Sam 22:9	When Doeg the Edomite had gone to Saul and told him, “David has gone to the house of Ahimelech.”
54	1 Sam 23:15-23	When the Ziphites had gone to Saul and said, “Is David not hiding among us?”

56	1 Sam 21:10-15	When the Philistines had seized him in Gath
57	1 Sam 24:1-22	When he had fled from Saul into the cave
59	1 Sam 19:11-18	When Saul had sent men to watch David's house in order to kill him
60	2 Sam 8:8, 13	When he fought Aram Naharaim and Aram Zobah, and when Joab returned and struck down twelve thousand Edomites in the valley of Salt
63	2 Sam 15:23	When he was in the desert of Judah
142	1 Sam 22:1	When he was in the cave

Some have challenged these titles as late and unreliable. However, Archer notes, "It is impossible to explain how 'later rabbis' would venture to attach titles of this sort to psalms whose text does not clearly reflect the situations in David's life which are assigned as settings for the compositions...The LXX furnishes conclusive evidence that the titles were added to the Hebrew Psalter at a date long before Hellenistic times. That is to say, there

are several technical terms appearing in the Hebrew titles the meanings of which had been completely forgotten by the time the Alexandrian translation was made (c.150–100 BC).<sup>6</sup> Others have challenged Davidic authorship altogether. However, most of the arguments used against Davidic authorship seem answerable.<sup>6</sup> First, although the Psalms portray David as speaking in the third person (Pss 20; 21; 61; 72; 110), other ancient authors as well as God (Exod 20:7) also spoke in the third person. Second, although various terms describing the sanctuary recur throughout the Psalms (Pss 5; 27; 28; 68; 69; 101; 138), these terms appear long before David's time in reference to the tabernacle (Ex 28:43; Judges 6:24; 18:31; 1 Sam 1:9; 3:3). Third, although Aramaisms appear in Psalm 139, David had access to Aramaic speaking peoples. Also, other ancient Near eastern literature demonstrates a propensity to include rare vocabulary for purposes of enrichment. It is also worth noting that New Testament writers have no problem ascribing Davidic authorship to many psalms (Matt 22:43–45; Luke 20:42; Acts 2:25–28; 4:25–26; Heb 4:7).

Interestingly, the LXX translators also ascribed authorship of some of the "post-exilic" Psalms as follows.

Psalm(s)	Author
120-134	Hezekiah
137	Jeremiah
146	Haggai
147	Zechariah
119	Ezra

### Scope

The scope of the Book of Psalms elapses in between the first Psalm written by Moses (90) and the last Psalm written in the postexilic era (126). Thus, the Psalms were written in between the time of Moses and the postexilic era (1410–430 BC). That some of the book was also written during the exilic era seems evident from the fact that Ps 137 was composed while its author was "by the waters of Babylon" (Ps 137:1). However, the stories presented in the Psalms are drawn from all of Israel's history. These stories include material taken from the creation, patriarchal, theocratic, monarchical, exilic, and post-exilic eras.

### Date

Moses, in between 1446–1405 BC, wrote the book's earliest psalm. The Davidic Psalms were written in between 1011–971 BC. Asaph's psalms were likely written during this same era. Solomon's material was written in between 971–931 B.C. The Psalms of the Ezrahites and Korah's sons were written during the days of the theocratic kingdom. Archer observes, "Of the psalms not carrying titles, some were undoubtedly Davidic (e.g., 2 and 33) and the others date from later periods all the way up to the return from exile (such as 126 and 137, the latter of which is at least as late as the Exile). No convincing evidence, however, has been offered for the dating of any of the psalms later than approximately 500 B.C."<sup>7</sup> No

part of the book could have been written during the Maccabean period since 1 Maccabees 7:17 quotes Psalm 79:3. This citation indicates that the book consisted of a completed canonical collection before the Maccabean era.<sup>8</sup>

### **Place of Writing**

Because of the reality of multiple authors, ascertaining the place where the psalms were written is difficult. Presumably, most of the psalms were written in Canaan. However, Geisler observes that some of the psalms were written outside of Canaan. He notes, "The original destination of the psalms, however, is determined by the period in which each was written. Some psalms are written to the Israelites wandering in the wilderness ([by Moses] 90), some to a monarch in regal rejoicing (24), some to sad exiles (137), and still others to the jubilant repatriated remnant."<sup>9</sup>

### **Recipients**

The following factors make the identification of the addressees of the book difficult to ascertain: anonymity in some cases, lack of a chronological setting, and the ambiguity regarding life situation out of which each individual composition arose.<sup>10</sup> However, despite this difficulty, it can be assumed that the Psalter was created for both private and public worship within Judaism. Such public worship was to take place within the first and second temple. Thus, the original audience of the Psalter was the worshipping community within the nation of Israel.

### **Structure**

The book's five-fold structure can be captured on the following chart:

Book	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Chapters</b>	1-41	42-72 <sup>13</sup>	73-89	90-106 <sup>14</sup>	107-150
<b>Primary author</b>	David	David/Korah	Asaph	Anonymous	David/anonymous
<b>Number of Psalms</b>	41	31	17	17	44
<b>Resemblance to the Pentateuch<sup>15</sup></b>	Genesis: man and creation	Exodus: deliverance and redemption	Leviticus: worship and sanctuary	Numbers: wilderness and wandering	Deuteronomy: Scripture and praise
<b>Resemblance to the history of the nation<sup>16</sup></b>	David's conflict with Saul	David's kingship	Assyrian crisis	Babylonian crisis: introspection	Regathering and return: praise and reflection upon

				concerning the temple's destruction and the exile	return from the exile
<b>Royal Psalms</b>	2; 18; 20; 21	45; 72	89		110; 132; 144
<b>Enthronement Psalms</b>		47	93; 96-99	110; 144; 132	
<b>Messianic Psalms</b>	2; 16; 22; 24; 40	45; 69; 72			110; 118
<b>Concluding doxology</b>	41:13 “Amen and amen”	72:18-19 “Amen and amen”	89:52 “Amen and amen”	106:48 “Amen. Praise the Lord”	150:1-6 “Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord”
<b>Possible compiler</b>	David	Hezekiah or Josiah	Hezekiah or Josiah	Ezra or Nehemiah	Ezra or Nehemiah
<b>Possible dates of composition</b>	1020-970 B.C.	970-610 B.C.	970-610 B.C.	Until 430 B.C.	Until 430 B.C.

### Compilation Process

The Psalter itself gives evidence of compilation (72:20). Dyer and Merrill explain the compilation process of the Psalter: “In a general way it seems that the collection of Psalms reflects a chronological process. That is, the indisputably earliest examples tend to occur in the first part of the Psalter and the latest in the latter parts. For example, the bulk of the Davidic psalms are in Book I and II, and Psalm 137, an exilic poem, is in Book V (Pss. 107-150).”<sup>17</sup>

Apparently some Psalms were utilized in Israel’s worship after they had been written down. Those Psalms sharing a common cluster of characteristics were categorized separately. This process eventually created five distinct books. Finally, these books were united into one comprehensive work. Potential collectors or compilers and editors throughout this

process were David (1 Chr 15:16), Hezekiah (2 Chr 29:30; Prov 25:1), and Ezra (Neh 8). David was probably instrumental in this process since he used his psalms in temple liturgy.<sup>18</sup>

### **Message**

Yahweh deserves worship and praise (145:21) in every range of present human experience and emotion because of His coming rule over the nations in general and His own people in particular.

### **Purposes**

The writers had several purposes in mind when they wrote their individual psalms. The editors and compilers also had several purposes in mind when they incorporated the existing hymnic material into the book's final form. First, they desired to create a source for both the individual and communal worship experience in the religious life of the nation of Israel. Second, they desired to hold up God as the answer to both the individual and national plight of the Jews.

Third, they wanted "to affirm the certainty of God's future rule on earth through the line of David wherein the righteous will be blessed and the wicked will be judged." Fourth, they wanted " to enable the reader to come into contact with God through the expression of the common, subjective daily experience of others." Fifth, they wanted to provide a vehicle for worshipful expression to God exemplifying the whole range of human emotions and experiences. Sixth, they wanted to articulate a desire for the messiah's first and second advents.

### **Themes**

Several theological themes recur throughout the Psalter. First, God is worthy of praise despite the predicament that human beings find themselves in. Such divine worthiness comes from who God is, what God has done, and what God will do. Thus, "God centeredness" represents a major feature of the Psalter. Second, the Psalter features the plight of humanity. The book brings the full gamut of human emotions and experiences to the forefront. Human beings are exhibited not only in the best of circumstances but also in the worst. Third, the Psalter focuses on the coming messiah who will bridge the unfathomable chasm between human need and divine essence.

### **Unique Characteristics**

The Book of Psalms boasts several outstanding characteristics. First, the book was used as part of Israel's liturgy during the first and second temple periods. This fact becomes obvious through the references to music in the superscriptions as well as through the book's 71 uses of "Selah" marking appropriate musical pauses, crescendos, and interludes. Second, the book was also used for liturgical purposes in the life of the early church (1 Cor 14:26; Eph 5:19; Col 3:16). Third, the book represents a guide not only for individual worship but also for the communal worship experience.

Fourth, the book represents the key source of the worship experience throughout the generations. Fifth, the book is the longest in the entire Bible. Its 150 chapters comprise 13% of the Bible's 1189 chapters. Sixth, the book contains both Scripture's longest (119) 22 and shortest (117) chapters. Seventh, the Book of Psalms is the most quoted book, not only in the rest of the Old Testament, but also in the NT. Interestingly, 107 psalms are either quoted directly or alluded to in the NT. Of the 360 quotations and allusions from the OT in the NT, roughly one third of them (112) come from the Psalms. The only seven New Testament books not referring to the psalms are Philippians, 1 Timothy, Philemon, 1, 2, 3 John, and Jude.

Eighth, Christ made extensive use of the Psalms during His earthly ministry. In fact, four of Christ's final seven statements from the cross (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34; Luke 23:46; John 19:28, 30) are recitations from various psalms (Ps 22:1; 69:21; 22:31; 31:5). Ninth, the book's multiple authorship causes it to be a rarity in the biblical canon. Tenth, the book demonstrates great diversity through its exploration of the full range of human emotion and experience.

Eleventh, the book's relation to the full range of human emotions and experiences make it extraordinarily relevant, personal, and practical. Thus, its universal applicability is unsurpassed. Twelfth, the book has much to say about God's Word thereby making great contributions to the field of Bibliology. Thirteenth, the book has much to say about God's attributes. This emphasis makes great contributions to the field of theology and also explains how humans are to rightly relate to God regardless of their circumstances.

Fourteenth, the book contains unparalleled poetic beauty.

### **Christ in the Psalms**

Christ's own interpretation of the psalms shows that He believed that some of them were messianic (Luke 24:44; John 15:22-25; Ps 69:4). Archer categorizes the messianic psalms as follows.<sup>24</sup>

Christ's Ascension.....	Ps. 68:18 (Eph. 4:8)
Christ's Betrayal.....	Ps. 41:9 (Luke 22:48)
Christ's Death.....	Ps. 22:1-21 (Matt. 2:7)
Christ's Deity.....	Ps. 45:6-7 (Heb. 1:8-9)
Christ's Exaltation.....	Ps. 8:5-6 (Heb 2:6-9)
Christ's Kingship.....	Ps. 2:6; 89:18-19 (Acts 5:31)
Christ's Lordship.....	Ps. 8:2 (Matt. 21:1516); Ps. 110:1 (Matt. 22:44; Acts 2:34)
Christ's Obedience.....	Ps. 40:6-8 (Heb. 10:5-7)
Christ's Priesthood.....	Ps. 110:4 (Heb. 10:5-7)
Christ's Resurrection.....	Ps. 2:7; 16:10 (Acts 2:25-28; 13:33-35)
Christ's Sonship.....	Ps. 2:7 (Matt. 3:17, Heb. 1:5)
Christ's Sufferings..	Ps. 69:9 (John 2:17, Rom 15:3) Ps. 69:4 (John 15:25)

Christ's Supremacy.....Ps. 118:22-23 (Matt. 21:42)

Examples of other Messianic Psalms include: 72, 102, 109.

However, some of these psalms seem to speak more directly of the messiah than others. Some are *typical messianic* in that the subject of the psalm is a type of Christ (34:20; 69:4, 9; 109:8; Acts 1:20). Others are *typical prophetic* in that their circumstances go beyond the psalmist and find a historical fulfillment in Christ (22). Others are *indirect messianic* in that they describe "a king or the house of David in general but awaits final fulfillment in Christ" (2; 45; 72). Others are *purely prophetic* since they refer directly to Christ rather than to David (110). Still others are *enthronement* since they anticipate the direct rule of Yahweh through Christ (96–99).

### Genre

Because the book's primary genre is poetry, Hebrew parallelism dominates the book. Parallelism occurs when the second line completes or contrasts the thought begun in the first line. Multiple forms of parallelism exist throughout the Psalter. *Synonymous* or comparative parallelism occurs when the second line of a couplet says the same thing as the first line but in different words (2:1,4; 3:1; 6:9; 7:16; 15:1; 24:1). *Antithetical* or contrastive parallelism occurs when the second line is contrasted with the first line (1:6; 11:5; 40:4; 57:6; 90:6).

*Synthetic* or compleptive parallelism further develops the line of thought begun in the first line but in different words (1:1; 7:10; 13:6; 15:3, 6; 19:7). The second line enriches, develops, adds color to, and enlarges upon a concept begun in the first line. Thus, the second line is a mere dependent clause and would make no sense without the first line. In this arrangement, the second line usually begins with the words "for" or "who."

In *climactic* or stair step parallelism, the second line conveys a thought not begun in the first line (23:1,2,4; 42:1; 57:1; 103:13; 113:5–6). The second line is virtually repeated with the exception of a new added term. In *emblematic* parallelism, one line explains the other through a figure of speech (29:1; 93:3; 96:7). The movement here is from point to picture. In this arrangement, the lines are introduced by "as" and "so" or one line is introduced by "like." In *non-parallelism*, the second line completes the thought begun in the first line with no parallel thoughts (2:6; 8:1; 25:22; 109:1; 119:89).

With *incomplete* parallelism, the first line has subject, verb, object or three parts of speech and the second line contains verb and object or only two parts of speech (2:11; 19:4; 21:10). In *chiastic* or inverted parallelism, terms or phrases are alternated in consecutive lines (51:3; 107:16). Mirror symmetry occurs here with the terms or phrases occurring in opposite sequence. In *terraceparallelism*, the last part of a line is repeated at the beginning of the next line (96:12b-13). A *tricola chiasmus* allows for a threefold repetition of a phrase or term (118:15–16). *Combinationparallelism* combines two or more of the above categories (7:12).

While prose communicates through literal descriptions, poetry communicates through figurative language. Thus, key figures of speech must be grasped before material composed in the poetic genre can be properly understood. With an *acrostic*, each successive line, verse, or stanza begins with successive letters of a word, phrase, or the letters of the Hebrew alphabet (9; 10; 24; 25; 34; 37; 111; 112; 119; 145). This arrangement serves as a mnemonic device. A *simile* compares two concepts through the use of the words "like" or "as" (1:3; 52:2).

A *metaphor* compares two concepts without the words "like" or "as" but through the use of a linking verb. Thus, the comparison is made by using the words "is" and "are" (23:1; 18:2; 84:11). A *hypocatastis* makes a comparison by naming something with another name (22:16). A *hyperbole* employs deliberate exaggeration in order to make a point (6:6; 40:12; 69:5). A *personification* ascribes human attributes to an inanimate object (35:10; 57:1; 77:16; 114:3). An *apostrophe* addresses something lifeless or absent as though alive or present (114:5-7; 148).

A *merism* uses two opposite extremes in order to convey the whole (95:5; 139:2). A *hendiadys* communicates a single idea through two separate words (42:5; 55:6a). An *anthropomorphism* ascribes human, bodily characteristics or actions to God (10:12; 34:15; 102:2). An *anthropopathism* speaks of God as possessing human emotion (6:1). A *zoomorphism* ascribes to God animal characteristics (17:8). A *metonymy* conveys an idea by using one word in the place of another. This arrangement is possible due to the close relationship between the two words (73:9).

A *synecdoche* uses the part of something as representative for the whole (52:2; 91:5). An *allegory* uses an extended metaphor in order to convey central thought (80:8ff). A *break up* involves the distribution of a unified phrase over the course of two lines (107:11). A *delayed identification* temporarily delays the identification of the primary referent in a given passage (34:18-19). An *inclusio* uses the same word or phrase at both the beginning and ending of a sentence, paragraph, or book in order to communicate that the entire section is dealing with the same subject matter (111:1,10; 146:1, 150:6).

Another important genre related item that is necessary in order to understand before meaning can be derived involves the classification of the category that a given psalm belongs to. Numerous classifications of psalms exist throughout the Psalter (1 Chr 16:4). An *individual lament* is a direct address to God requesting His rescue or defense. Such psalms are provoked by unjust accusations, penitence for sins, illness, or incapacity. The elements of an individual lament (142) include an introductory cry to God (142:1-2), the lament itself designed to invoke divine action (142:3-4), a confession of trust in God (142:5-6), the petition to God to either hear or save or punish someone (142:7), an expression of confidence in being heard, a declaration of a vow or praise to God, and a report of God's deliverance. Most of the psalms in the Psalter are of this type (3-7; 12; 13;

17; 22; 25–28; 31; 35; 38–43; 51; 53–57; 59; 61; 63–64; 69; 71; 77; 86; 88–89; 102; 108–109; 120; 130; 140–144).

A special category of the individual lament psalms is the *penitent psalms* where the psalmist expresses remorse over his sin as well as his need for God forgiveness (6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143). A *communal lament* is essentially the same as an individual lament except that the nation rather than the individual makes the petition (20; 44; 58; 60; 67; 74; 70–80; 83; 85; 90; 94; 108; 123; 126; 127). Circumstances giving rise to such prayers include invasion, defeat, oppression, danger of attack, and physical disasters such as plague, drought, or famine. The elements of a communal lament (80) include an introductory petition to God that involves an address or a cry for help or a report of some former saving deed, the lament itself, a confession of trust in God, a petition for God to hear or save or punish someone, and a vow of praise.

An *individual thanksgiving* or declarative praise involves thanking God for past action on the psalmist's behalf (18; 21; 30; 32; 34; 40–41; 52; 66; 106; 116; 118; 138). The elements of an individual thanksgiving involve the proclamation of an intention to praise God, a summary statement, a reflection on some past deed by God, a report of deliverance, a renewed vow to praise God, and concluding descriptive praise. A *communal thanksgiving* psalm is essentially the same as a psalm of individual thanksgiving except that it is sung by the entire nation. In other words, it is an acknowledgment of thanksgiving by the entire nation (65–66; 75; 105; 107; 124; 126; 129). Its basic elements involve an introductory praise to God, a reflection on a past need, and a report of divine deliverance.<sup>32</sup>

A general or *descriptive praise* psalm involves praising God in general for who He is and what He does (8; 19; 29; 33; 36; 103–105; 111; 113; 117; 135–136; 139; 146–147; 150). In other words, it is praise to God due to His attributes and acts. These psalms typically revolve around the word "praise" (the phrases "hallelujah" and "praise the Lord" is found in several of these psalms) and magnify God's name and boast of His greatness, and are more general than a thanksgiving psalm. The basics elements of this type of psalm are a call to praise God, a cause to praise God, and a renewed call to praise God.<sup>33</sup>

*Enthronement psalms* describe Yahweh's reign over the entire earth (47; 93; 96–99).

These psalms can be identified through the repetition of various phrases such as "The Lord reigns" (93; 96–97, 99), "the great king" (47) and "the Lord comes to judge" (98). The *royal psalms* describe a human ruler and go far beyond him in order to depict God's future rulership over the entire earth. Thus, these psalms praise God for this future rule (2; 18; 20; 21; 45; 72; 89; 101; 110; 132; 144).

A related category is the *messianic psalms* that develop the two advents of the coming messiah (2; 8; 16; 22; 34; 40; 45; 69; 72; 89; 96–98; 102; 109; 110; 118; 132). The *songs of Zion* extol Zion as the place of God's future worldwide rule (46–48; 72; 76; 84; 87). A connected category is the *pilgrimage psalms* or the songs of ascent that were sung by the

Jewish worshippers as they traveled to Jerusalem in order to celebrate Israel's three annual feasts (Deut 16:16) of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (120–134). These songs were designed to establish an attitude of reverence before the worshippers reached their final destination.

*Wisdom* or didactic psalms instruct and exhort the reader in the way of holiness (1; 14; 36–37; 49; 62; 73; 112; 119; 127–128; 133). They possess many attributes found in wisdom literature such as the contrast between the path of righteousness and unrighteousness (1), the "better than" sayings (37:16; 63:3; 84:10; 119:27), the numerical sayings (62:11–12a), blessings for righteousness (1:1; 112:2; 119:1), and the problem of prosperity of the ungodly (37; 49; 73). A related category is the *Torah psalms*, which have the effect of extolling the value of God's Word (1; 15; 19; 119; 122). The *imprecatory psalms* record the psalmist calling down a curse upon his enemies (7; 9; 10; 31; 35; 40; 54–55; 58–59; 69–71; 79; 83; 94; 109; 129; 137; 139; 140; 144).

## **Hermeneutics**

Because the Psalms represent an independent genre, they must be interpreted according to specific principles of that genre. First, the Book of Psalms must be interpreted according to the aforementioned principles of Hebrew poetry. Second, a setting for a given Psalm should not be presupposed unless it is overtly given in the title. Some psalms lack such a title. Even in the many psalms possessing a title the setting can still remain ambiguous. Third, "some of the psalms are associated with definite aspects of Israel's worship (e.g., 5:7; 66:13; 68:24–25), and this can help in understanding those Psalms." Fourth, the aforementioned category that a given psalm belongs to must be ascertained before its meaning can be derived. Fifth, although messianic psalms abound throughout the Psalter, care must be taken not to unnaturally force psalms into a messianic framework. In other words, a consistent application of the literal, grammatical, historical method of interpretation, as opposed to allegorical interpretation, must be followed when deciphering the Psalter.

## **Outline**

### **I. Book 1: David's Conflict with Saul 1–41**

#### **Psalm Category Content of the Message**

1. Wisdom Psalm: Contrast between wise and foolish living (1:1–6)
2. Royal Psalm: Coronation of the King-Son and God's anointed (2:1–12)
3. Individual Lament: Prayer of deliverance from adversaries (3:1–8)
4. Individual Lament: Cry out to God for deliverance from enemies (4:1–8)
5. Individual Lament: Confidence in God who hates iniquity (5:1–12)
6. Individual Lament: Penitent prayer and petition for deliverance (6:1–10)
7. Individual Lament: Persecution of the innocent and cry for talionic justice (7:1–17)
8. Descriptive Praise: Creation and divine glory compared to man (8:1–9)

9. Declarative Praise/Imprecatory: Thanks for vindication (9:1-20)
10. Declarative Praise/Imprecatory: Judgment upon the wicked (10:1-18)
11. Descriptive Praise: Faith and confidence rather than fear (11:1-7)
12. Communal Lament: Wickedness exalted rather than truth (12:1-8)
13. Individual Lament: A cry for Deliverance from affliction (13:1-6)
14. Communal Lament: Terror and victory over fools (14:1-7)
15. Liturgical Psalm: Godly character in God's presence (15:1-5)
16. Individual Lament: Refuge and resurrection of the afflicted (16:1-11)
17. Individual Lament: Righteous protected from the wicked (17:1-15)
18. Royal Psalm: Royal deliverance and thanksgiving (18:1-50)
19. Descriptive Praise: God's glory: His works and words (19:1-14)
20. Royal Psalm: Prayer and faith in God for battle (20:1-9)
21. Royal Psalm: Thanking God for the king's victory (21:1-13)
22. Individual Lament: Impending destruction and praise for deliverance (22:1-31)
23. Descriptive Praise: God's providential Care for His own (23:1-6)
24. Liturgy Psalm: Preparation for the king of glory (24:1-10)
25. Individual Lament: Acrostic prayer asking for forgiveness (25:1-22)
26. Individual Lament: Plea of the innocent (26:1-12)
27. Psalm of Trust: Song of trust in God for conquest over fear (27:1-14)
28. Individual Lament: Cry for divine intervention and God's silence (28:1-9)
29. Descriptive Praise: Hymn exemplifying God's power and voice (29:1-11)
30. Declarative Praise: Saved from death (30:1-12)
31. Individual Lament: Trusting God in times of adversity (31:1-24)
32. Individual Lament: Forgiving the repentant (32:1-11)
33. Descriptive Praise: Righteous praise the Lord (33:1-22)
34. Declarative Praise: Victory over adversity (34:1-22)
35. Individual Lament: Crying-out for deliverance before the wicked (35:1-28)
36. Individual Lament: Arrogance of the wicked and deliverance from them (36:1-12)
37. Wisdom Psalm Righteous can trust in the Lord (37:1-40)
38. Individual Lament Cry for help (38:1-22)
39. Individual Lament Request for deliverance and hope (39:1-13)
40. Declarative Praise Praise for deliverance and continuing praise to God (40:1-17)
41. Declarative Praise Righteous thank God for deliverance (41:1-13)

## **II. Book 2: David's Conquering Kingship (Ps 42-72)**

42. Individual Lament Trusting in God (42:1--43:5)
43. Individual Lament Trusting in God (42:1--43:5)
44. Communal Lament Eventual victory in light of momentary defeat (44:1-26)

- 45. Royal Psalm Royal Wedding (45:1-17)
- 46. Songs of Zion God's protection (46:1-11)
- 47. Songs of Zion God's Enthronement and Exaltation (47:1-10)
- 48. Songs of Zion Zion as God's City (48:1-14)
- 49. Wisdom Psalm Riches cannot redeem (49:1-20)
- 50. Liturgy Psalm Hypocrisy and divine judgment (50:1-23)
- 51. Individual Lament David's confession and repentance (51:1-19)
- 52. Psalm of Trust & Deliverance from the deceitful (52:1-9)
- 53. Wisdom Psalm Destiny of the fool (53:1-6)
- 54. Individual Lament Pursued by the wicked yet trust in God (54:1-7)
- 55. Individual Lament Betrayal from a friend (55:1-23)
- 56. Individual Lament Trust in God in the midst of trials (56:1-13)
- 57. Individual Lament Retribution against the wicked and praise to God (57:1-11)
- 58. Communal Lament The Judgment upon the wicked (58:1-11)
- 59. Individual Lament Deliverance from the violent (59:1-17)
- 60. Communal Lament National chastisement and Davidic confession (60:1-12)
- 61. Individual Lament Praying of deliverance and praise (61:1-8)
- 62. Psalm of Trust & Wait on the God who is the rock of refuge (62:1-12)
- 63. Individual Lament Thirsty soul worships God (63:1-11)
- 64. Individual Lament Protection from and justice for the wicked (64:1-10)
- 65. Communal Thanksgiving Song for God's provisions through nature (65:1-13)
- 66. Declarative Praise Praise for God's goodness (66:1-20)
- 67. Declarative Praise Praising God for His Blessing (67:1-7)
- 68. Declarative Praise God's Deliverance of Zion (68:1-35)
- 69. Individual Lament Petition of deliverance resulting from zeal regarding the Lord's habitation (69:1-36)
- 70. Individual Lament Cry for help (70:1-5)
- 71. Individual Lament Reflection of the elderly upon God's goodness (71:1-24)
- 72. Royal Psalm Hymn for the king's coronation (72:1-20)

### **III. Book 3: Assyrian Crisis in the Eighth Century (Ps 73-89)**

- 73. Wisdom Psalm Divine glory and the destruction of the wicked (73:1-28)
- 74. Communal Lament Temple's destruction (74:1-23)
- 75. Declarative Praise God's acts and warning against pride (75:1-10)
- 76. Song of Zion Jacob's omnipotent God will conquer (76:1-12)
- 77. Communal Lament Comfort in the midst of adversity (77:1-20)
- 78. Didactic Psalm God's past guidance despite Israel's faithlessness (78:1-72)
- 79. Communal Lament Destruction of Jerusalem and her temple (79:1-13)

80. Communal Lament God's anger and Israel's appeal for mercy (80:1-19)
81. Didactic Psalm Festival Commemorating God's deliverance (81:1-16)
82. Communal Lament God's Judgment against Israel's judges (82:1-8)
83. Communal Lament God's confounding of Israel's enemies (83:1-18)
84. Song of Zion Joy of swelling with God (84:1-12)
85. Communal Lament Israel restoration to revival and righteousness (85:1-13)
86. Individual Lament When opposed appeal to God (86:1-17)
87. Song of Zion A song of Zion's deliverance (87:1-7)
88. Individual Lament Despair and resulting prayer for deliverance (88:1-18)
89. Royal Psalm Prayer for remembrance of the Davidic Covenant (89:1-52)

#### **IV. Book 4: Pensive Consideration About the Temple's Destruction and Exile 90–106**

90. Communal Lament Man's mortality (90:1-17)
91. Wisdom Psalm God's protection (91:1-16)
92. Declarative Praise Exalting God for His acts and goodness (92:1-15)
93. Enthronement Psalm Yahweh's enthronement as King over everything (93:1-5)
94. Communal Lament God will excommunicate the wicked (94:1-23)
95. Enthronement Psalm Acknowledge past discipline or perish (95:1-11)
96. Enthronement Psalm Yahweh as King over all (96:1-13)
97. Enthronement Psalm Yahweh as King over all (97:1-12)
98. Enthronement Psalm Yahweh as King over all (98:1-9)
99. Enthronement Psalm Yahweh as King over all (99:1-9)
100. Descriptive Praise God's Greatness and Goodness (100:1-5)
101. Royal Psalm David's commitment and responsibilities as king (101:1-8)
102. Individual Lament Psalmist overwhelmed yet God Responds (102:1-28)
103. Descriptive Praise Bless God for His greatness (103:1-22)
104. Descriptive Praise Praising God for His creative works (104:1-35)
105. Didactic Psalm Yahweh keeps and remembers His covenant (105:1-45)
106. Communal Lament Sinful Israel yet there is still hope in God (106:1-48)

#### **V. Book 5: Praise Celebration on Returning from Exile and the Dawn of a New Era (Ps 107–150)**

107. Declarative Praise The righteous praise God (107:1-43)
108. Communal Lament Victory in conflict through God's Power (108:1-13)
109. Individual Lament Vengeance on the wicked while the righteous are favored (109:1-31)
110. Royal Psalm The Enthronement of the King-Priest-Judge (110:1-7)

111. Descriptive Praise Yahweh to be praised on account of His works (111:1-10)
112. Wisdom Psalm Acrostic Psalm: Blessing for covenant obedience (112:1-10)
113. Hallel Psalm Passover: The lowly praises God's for His greatness (113:1-9)
114. Hallel Psalm Praise for the Exodus and the Conquest (114:1-8)
115. Hallel Psalm Weakness of idols and God's greatness (115:1-18)
116. Hallel Psalm God's Grace leading to obedience (116:1-19)
117. Hallel Psalm Nations praise God (117:1-2)
118. Hallel Psalm God's Faithfulness in human weakness (118:1-29)
119. Wisdom Psalm An Acrostic: Delight in God's Law (119:1-176)
120. Pilgrim Psalm Individual Lament: Request for help in overcoming sin (120:1-7)
121. Pilgrim Psalm Individual Confidence: God's protection during the Journey (121:1-8)
122. Pilgrim Psalm Song of Zion: Pray for the peace of Jerusalem (122:1-9)
123. Pilgrim Psalm Communal Lament: Contempt and hatred for Israel (123:1-4)
124. Pilgrim Psalm Descriptive Praise: Praise for divine deliverance (124:1-8)
125. Pilgrim Psalm Communal Confidence: The Lord's protection (125:1-5)
126. Pilgrim Psalm Communal Lament: Postexilic restoration of Zion (126:1-6)
127. Pilgrim Psalm Wisdom Psalm: Only the Lord's wisdom endures (127:1-5)
128. Pilgrim Psalm Wisdom Psalm: Prosperity upon the God fearing (128:1-6)
129. Pilgrim Psalm Communal Lament: Restoration of Zion (129:1-8)
130. Pilgrim Psalm Individual Lament: Wait upon God because of His forgiveness (130:1-8)
131. Pilgrim Psalm Individual confidence: Trusting as a child in God (131:1-3)
132. Pilgrim Psalm Royal Psalm: God's favor to David (132:1-18)
133. Pilgrim Psalm Wisdom Psalm: Beauty of unity and brotherly Love (133:1-3)
134. Pilgrim Psalm Liturgical Psalm: Praise and bless God (134:1-2)
135. Descriptive Praise Hallelujah Psalm: Praise God for His marvelous deeds (135:1-21)
136. Descriptive Praise Great Hallel: Praise God for His grace toward Israel (136:1-26)
137. Communal Lament Exilic Psalm from Babylon: Israel's regret and request for retribution upon her enemies (137:1-9)
138. Declarative Praise Praise God for His divine favor (138:1-8)
139. Descriptive Praise Wisdom Psalm: God's Preservation (139:1-24)
140. Individual Lament Deliverance from the violent (140:1-13)
141. Individual Lament Divine power in the midst of adversities (141:1-10)
142. Individual Lament Deliverance by the caring God (142:1-7)
143. Individual Lament Deliverance by God from the wicked (143:1-12)
144. Royal Psalm Dependence upon the Lord in battle (144:1-15)
145. Descriptive Praise Praising God's greatness and grace (145:1-21)
146. Descriptive Praise Hallelujah psalms: God's righteous judgments (146:1-10)

147. Descriptive Praise Hallelujah postexilic psalms: restoration of Jerusalem (147:1-20)
148. Descriptive Praise Hallelujah psalms: apostrophe of creation praising God's for His greatness (148:1-14)
149. Descriptive Praise Hallelujah psalms: God's Elective grace upon Israel (149:1-9)
150. Descriptive Praise Hallelujah psalms: A Call for all to praise God (150:1-6)

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## **Introduction**

The Psalms are Israel's hymnal; it is poetry laced with strong theology. In Hebrew, this book is called *Tehillim*, "Praises." There are 55 psalms addressed to "the chief musician." [Greek: *psalmoi*, "a poem to be sung to a stringed instrument" or psaltar, for harp or stringed instrument.] History instructs; Law teaches; prophecy announces, rebukes, chastens; morality persuades. Psalms is the medicine and succor for the comfort and encouragement of us all. They are written to the individual—all of us, individually. They are musical. Odes = poems to be set to music; lyrics = poems intended for lyre or harp.

## **The Nature of Poetry**

Phonetic Design: Rhyme is the parallelism of sound; rhythm is the parallelism of time.

Conceptual Design: The Parallelism of Ideas

- Comparative - to illuminate
- Contrastive - antithetic
- Completive - synthetic

Selah: a pause to connect ideas

## **Parallelism**

(1) Synonymous parallelism is where the second line restates the first:

— LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? (Ps 15:1)

(2) Antithetical parallelism is just the opposite—the lines are in contrast to each other:

— For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth (Ps 37:9)

(3) Synthetic (Progressive) parallelism is where each successive line expands the meaning:

— The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether (Ps 19:8-9)

## **Sources**

73 David

12 Asaph, Head of David's choir

12 Sons of Korah

2 Solomon

1 Heman, the Ezrahite

1 Ethan, the Ezrahite

1 Moses

48 Anonymous

150

### **A "Pentateuch" of Psalms**

There are five divisions, each ending with a benediction: (1-41, 42-72, 73-89, 90-106, 107-150)

- (1) Genesis - About Man (Ps 1-41)
- (2) Exodus - Deliverance (Ps 42-72)
- (3) Leviticus - Sanctuary (Ps 73-89)
- (4) Numbers - Unrest; Wandering (Ps 90-106)
- (5) Deuteronomy - Word of the Lord (Ps 107-150)

### **Genesis Section: Ps 1-41**

- Man in View: in a state of blessedness, fall, and recovery
- Perfect Man (Last Adam) (Ps 1)
- Rebellious Man (Ps 2)
- Perfect Man Rejected (Ps 3)
- Conflict between Seed of Woman & Serpent (Ps 4)
- Perfect Man in Midst of Enemies (Ps 5)
- Perfect Man in Midst of Chastisement (Bruising Heel) (Ps 6)
- Perfect Man in Midst of False Witnesses (Ps 7)
- Repair of Man Comes through Man (Bruising Head) (Ps 8)
- Enemy and Antichrist Conflict; Final Deliverance (Ps 9-15)
- Christ in Midst of His People Sanctifying Them to God (Ps 16-41)

### **Inscriptions**

34 Without inscriptions

52 Simple Inscriptions

14 Historical Inscriptions

4 Inscription denoting purpose

15 "Songs of Degrees"

31 Special inscriptions

Simple = "A psalm of David"; "A psalm of Asaph," etc.

Historical = "A Psalm of David when he fled from Absalom, his son"

Purpose = "for the sabbath day" etc.

"Degrees" = ["Steps" on the Temple? ...clues from Hezekiah]

Special = Musical instructions, etc.

### **Special Terms**

- Aileleth-Shahar - the hind of the morning; dawn
- Alamot - the maidens' choir
- Al-Tashchith - destroy not
- Gittith - winepresses (autumn)
- Jeduthun - Praise-giver (1 of 3 directors of worship)
- Jonath-Elem-Rechokim - Dove of distant woods (of David in flight)
- Mahalath - The Great Dancing
- Maschi - instruction; understanding
- Michtam Engraven - emphasized; permanent
- Muth-labbeyn - Death of the Champion - should be at end of Psalm 8, not at the beginning of Psalm 9
- Negionoth - stringed instruments
- Nehiloth - inheritances
- Sheminith - 8th group or division
- Shiggaion - a crying aloud (grief or joy)
- Shoshannim - lilies (springtime)

### **Habakkuk's Psalm**

- The Superscription (Hab 3:1): "A Prayer of Habakkuk the Prophet, upon Shigionoth" (Shigionoth: A crying aloud, either grief or joy).
- The Psalm itself (Hab 3:2-19)
- The Subscription (Hab 3:19): "To the Chief Musician upon Negionoth" (Stringed instruments)

### **Hezekiah's Psalm**

- The Superscription (Is 38:9): "The writing of Hezekiah, king of Judah, when he had been sick and was recovered of his sickness."
- The Psalm itself (Is 38:10-20)

- The Subscription (Is 38:20): "Therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments, all the days of our life, in the house of YHWH."
- Note the plural "songs" in the subscription. The occasion was his recovery (superscription).

### **Other Psalm Groupings**

- Penitential Psalms: 6,32,38-39,51,102,143
- Hallelujah Psalms: 106,111-113,135,146-150
- Imprecatory Psalms: 35,57,59,69,83,109,137, et al
- Imprecatory psalms: Don't confuse forgiving with condoning; act vs. attitude (Cf. Paul on Alexander the coppersmith, 2 Tim 4:14; Gal 1:8,9, etc.)
- 1st mention: David, Ps 5:10 - "Destroy thou them, O God; let them fall by their own counsels. Cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions; for they have rebelled against thee."
- Acrostic Psalms: 9,25,34,37,111-112,119,145
- Acrostic Psalm: 119 - 22 sections (for each Hebrew letter); each section of 16 lines in 8 couplets, each couplet beginning with same letter of the Hebrew alphabet

### **A Caveat for our Souls**

- Chewing the cud: The key to (the "clean") sacrifices
- Analysis paralysis: Can blindfold our souls to the message
- Prayerful absorption vs. intellectual dissection: A gateway to His presence

### **The Book of Psalms**

Contrast: Two Men, Two Ways, Two Destinies: God sees but two persons in this world: the godly, who are "in Christ" and the ungodly, who are "in Adam." See 1 Cor 15:22,49. Let us look at these two persons.