

Psalms

I. The Main Idea of Psalms

Psalms is the worship book of Ancient Israel.

It contains a wide variety of styles (including songs, prayers, laments, praises, thanksgiving, and wisdom) and situations (including both private and corporate prayers and worship).

Despite the fact that the psalmists struggle with trials, challenges, and injustice, the dominant theme in the book of Psalms is: "The Lord reigns!"

II. Outline of Psalms

- Book 1: Psalms 1–41 David's Rise to Power through Affliction
- Book 2: Psalms 42–72 David's Reign to Solomon
- Book 3: Psalms 73–89 Solomon to the Destruction of the Temple
- Book 4: Psalms 90–106 Exilic Reflection on Yahweh's Past Deliverance of Israel
- Book 5: Psalms 107–150 Hope for Yahweh's Future Deliverance

In general, the book moves from despair to hope. Many of the earlier psalms depict "life in the trenches," wrestling with sin, oppression, and trials. Many of the later psalms focus on worshipping God.

This arrangement appears to have been made early, but the reasons for grouping them together in this way is not abundantly obvious.

- For example, although Psalm 72:20 at the end of Book 2 states that "The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended," there are a few Davidic psalms that follow later in the book (see Psa. 86:1, 101, 103, etc.).
- At the same time, it should be noted that the first two collections have a higher concentration of Davidic psalms than the other three, and the first book is almost exclusively comprised of psalms attributed to David.

Within these books, several collections of psalms can be identified, such as:

- Psalms by the Sons of Korah (Psa 42-49), a clan within the tribe of Levi.
- Psalms by Asaph (Psa 73-83), a Levite appointed by David to help lead worship at the Tabernacle (1 Chr. 6:31-48).

- the “Psalms of Ascents” (Psa 120-134), used by travelers on their way to worship in Jerusalem.
- The Hallelujah Psalms (Psa 146-150), each of which begin and end with the Hebrew word Hallelujah, translated as “Praise the LORD!”

Fast Facts on Psalms

- Psalms contains the longest chapter in the Bible: Psalm 119.
- Psalm 117 is the middle chapter of the Bible and is the shortest psalm.
- Psalms is the most frequently quoted OT book in the NT.
- In the Hebrew Bible, the book of Psalms is called “Praises”.
- Some of the oldest and youngest portions of the Old Testament are found in this book. The authors span from Moses (Psalm 90) to the exile (“the waters of Babylon,” Psalm 137).

III. Interpretive Keys to Psalms

Genre: Poetry

- It expresses “experiences, ideas, or emotions in a style more concentrated, imaginative, and powerful than that of ordinary speech or prose.”
- Form of poetry is Hebrew parallelism.

Authors:

- There are several authors identified for various psalms.
 - David wrote at least 73 psalms in the book.
 - The sons of Korah (a family within the tribe of Levi) wrote 10 psalms.
 - Asaph (a Levite appointed by David to help lead worship at the Tabernacle, see 1 Chr. 6:31-48) wrote 12 psalms.
 - Solomon wrote two (Psa 72 & 127).
 - Moses, Heman and Ethan (for these last two, see 1 Chr. 6:31-48 again) each wrote at least one (Psa 90, 88, & 89, respectively).

Titles:

- Most of the psalms (116 out of 150) begin with editorial information that is not part of the poem itself. Typically these comments are referred to as “titles.”
 - Often the title merely identifies the author (or authors) or gives instructions for singing or playing the song.

- However, there are some titles that provide the background of or intended setting for the psalm (Ps. 3, 7, 18, 30, 34, 38, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, 70, 92, 100, 102, 142).
- *Are the Titles Inspired? Should They Be Considered Part of God's Word?*
 - As far as we can tell, the answer is yes. The evidence points to the psalm titles as being inspired.
 - For one thing, the Hebrew Bible assigns verse numbers to the titles (or includes the title in verse 1).
 - For another, 2 Samuel 22 affirms the accuracy of the title of Psalm 18. In both places, David is identified as the author.
 - Lastly, Jesus and the apostles affirmed the accuracy of five of the titles:
 - In Acts 2:25-28 and Acts 13:35-36, Peter and Paul identify David as the author of Psalm 16. The title states it is "A *miktam* of David."
 - In Romans 4:5-8, Paul identifies David as the author of Psalm 32. The title states it is "A *maskil* of David."
 - In Acts 1:16-20 and Romans 11:9-10, Peter and Paul identify David as the author of Psalm 69. The title states it is "Of David."
 - In Acts 1:16-20, Peter identifies David as the author of Psalm 109. The title states it is "A Psalm of David."
 - In Matt 22:41-45, Mark 12:35-37, and Luke 20:41-44, Jesus identifies David as the author of Psalm 110. (See also Peter's testimony in Acts 2:34-36.) The title of the psalm states it is "A Psalm of David."

Imprecatory Psalms:

- Many of the psalms are uncomfortable to modern Christians because they are calling for God's judgment to fall on the psalmist's enemies. (For example, see Psa 5:8-10.) Since Jesus told us to "love our enemies" and "pray for those who persecute you," these psalms seem out of place in the Bible. How should we interpret these psalms? How do they fit within a Christian worldview?
- It is important to remember that in the Old Testament context, the enemies of God's people were also God's enemies. So the psalmist is calling for God to execute judgments on God's enemies, which has its place in a biblical worldview.
- Even the New Testament (especially the book of Revelation; see 19:1-5) talks about and even celebrates God's judgment falling on God's enemies.
 - Furthermore, the apostle Paul sometimes used language that is reminiscent of the imprecatory psalms (see Acts 13:9-11; 1 Cor 16:22; Gal 1:8-9).

IV. Key Passages of Psalms

Psalms 1 & 2 provide an introduction to the book.

- Psalm 1 is a reflection on the type of person reflected in the psalms.
 - The psalms were written by people who walk in the paths of righteousness, not those who walk in the path of the wicked.
 - This is a description of the type of people who wrote the psalms, but also a description of what your life should be as you read and meditate on the psalm. By spending time in the Psalms, your life should progressively become more like the righteous person described in Psalm 1.
- Psalm 2 introduces the Messianic element within the book of Psalms. Many of the psalms were written by David, God's messiah in the Old Testament. And many of the psalms prophecy of the even greater "David": Jesus, the ultimate Messiah. Just as David ruled over the nations in the OT period, Jesus will rule over the nations in the future.

Psalms of Note:

- Psalm 23 – The Lord is My Shepherd.
- Psalm 42 – Thirsting After God.
- Psalm 51 – David's Prayer of Confession.
- Psalm 119 – A Celebration of God's Torah (law/instruction)
- Psalm 120-134 – The Psalms of Ascent: songs sung by Jewish worshippers who are traveling to Jerusalem for one of the festivals; the topics move from far away from the temple to being right inside the temple courts.

V. Messianic Elements within Psalms

Adapted from Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

Many of the Psalms can be called "Messianic" because they either prophesy about the Messiah or the psalmist is foreshadowing something Jesus will do.

- *The Conquering King and Enthroned Messiah: Psalm 110 and 2*
 - Psalm 110:1
"Yahweh says to my Lord:
'Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your footstool.'"

- Psalm 2:2
 "The kings of the earth set themselves,
 and the rulers take counsel together,
 against the LORD and against his Anointed."
- Psalm 2:7
 "I will tell of the decree:
 Yahweh said to me, "You are my Son;
 today I have begotten you."
- Psalm 2:12
 "Kiss the Son,
 lest he be angry, and you perish in the way,
 for his wrath is quickly kindled.
 Blessed are all who take refuge in him."
- *The Rejection of the Messiah – Psalm 118*
 - Psalm 118:22
 "The stone that the builders rejected
 has become the cornerstone."
- *The Betrayal of Messiah - Psalm 69 and 109*
 - Psalm 69:9
 "For zeal for your house has consumed me,
 and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me."
 - Psalm 69:21
 "They also gave me gall for my food
 And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink."
 - Psalm 109:1–5
 "Be not silent, O God of my praise!
 For wicked and deceitful mouths are opened against me,
 speaking against me with lying tongues.
 They encircle me with words of hate,
 and attack me without cause.
 In return for my love they accuse me,
 but I give myself to prayer.
 So they reward me evil for good,
 and hatred for my love."
- *The Death and Resurrection of Messiah – Psalm 22 and 16*
 - Psalm 22:1
 "My God, my God,
 why have you forsaken me?
 Why are you so far from saving me,
 from the words of my groaning?"
 - Psalm 22:7-8

- "All who see me mock me;
 they make mouths at me;
 they wag their heads;
 "He trusts in Yahweh; let him deliver him;
 let him rescue him, for he delights in him!"
- Psalm 22:14-18
 "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint;
 my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast;
 my strength is dried up like a potsherd,
 and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.
 For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me;
 they have pierced my hands and feet—
 I can count all my bones—
 they stare and gloat over me;
 they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots."
 - Psalm 16:10
 "For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,
 or let your holy one see corruption."
 - *The Written Plan and Marriage of Messiah – Psalm 40 and 45*
 - Psalm 40:7-10
 "Then I said, 'Behold, I have come;
 in the scroll of the book it is written of me:
 I delight to do your will, O my God;
 your law is within my heart.'
 I have told the glad news of deliverance
 in the great congregation;
 behold, I have not restrained my lips,
 as you know, O Lord.
 I have not hidden your deliverance within my heart;
 I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation;
 I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness
 from the great congregation."
 - Psalm 45:6-7
 "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.
 The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness;
 you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness.
 Therefore God, your God, has anointed you
 with the oil of gladness beyond your companions."
 - *The Triumph of Messiah - Psalms 68 and 72*
 - Psalm 68:18
 "You ascended on high,
 leading a host of captives in your train

and receiving gifts among men,
even among the rebellious, that the Lord God may dwell there.”