

PSALMS

The book of Psalms is the largest and perhaps the most widely used book in the Bible. It explores the full range of human experiences in a very personal and practical way. Written over a lengthy period of Israel's history, the tremendous breadth of subject matter in the Psalms includes topics such as jubilation, war, peace, worship, judgment, messianic prophecy, praise, and lament. The Psalms were set to the accompaniment of stringed instruments and served as the temple hymnbook and devotional guide for the Jewish people.

The book of Psalms was gradually collected and came to be known as the *Sepher Tehillim* ("Book of Praises"), because almost every psalm contains some note of praise to God. The Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) uses the Greek term *Psalmoi* as a title for this book, meaning poems sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments, and this word is the basis for the English terms "psalter" and "psalm."

Author

No other book of the Bible has as many different authors as does Psalms. Seventy-three psalms are attributed to David in the superscriptions, and an additional two, Psalms 2 and 95, are ascribed to David in the New Testament. In addition to the seventy-five by David, twelve are ascribed to Asaph, a priest who headed the service of music. Ten were by the sons of Korah, a guild of singers and composers, and other psalms are ascribed to Solomon, Moses, Heman the Ezrahite, and Ethan the Ezrahite. Fifty of the psalms are anonymous, although some of these are traditionally ascribed to Ezra.

Date

The psalms were originally individual poems. With the passing of time these were collected to form smaller books and the book of Psalms in its present form comprises five of these smaller books. The earliest individual psalm is probably that of Moses (Ps. 90); the latest is probably Psalm 137, which could not have been written before the sixth century B.C. Though many of the psalms were written and collected during the Davidic era, or shortly thereafter, the final compilation of Psalms was probably not complete until the latter half of the fifth century B.C. during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah (450–425 B.C.).

Themes and Literary Structure

The Psalter is really five books in one, and each book ends with a doxology. A number of different classification systems for psalm types have been developed, systems often based on the content or life-situation of the individual psalms. It is common to speak of psalms of lament, thanksgiving psalms, enthronement psalms, pilgrimage psalms, royal psalms, wisdom psalms, and imprecatory psalms.

The poetry of the Psalms is unsurpassed. The one characteristic of Hebrew poetry most evident is parallelism, the relationship of one line or verse to another. Four of the most important types of Hebrew parallelism are: (1) synonymous parallelism, in which the second line of a couplet repeats the idea of the first line (e.g., 3:1; 24:1); (2) antithetic parallelism, where the thought of the second line is contrasted with that of the first line (e.g., 1:6; 90:6); (3) synthetic parallelism, in which the second line is a further development of the thought begun in the first

line (e.g., 1:1; 19:7); (4) and emblematic parallelism, where the second line illustrates the thought of the first line, often by a simile (e.g., 42:1). Nine psalms are alphabetical or acrostic (Pss. 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145). In acrostic psalms each successive line or group of lines begins with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The classic example of an acrostic poem is Psalm 119, in which each of the eight verses in a given stanza begins with the same letter.

OUTLINE OF PSALMS

Book One: Psalms 1–41

1. Two Ways of Life Contrasted
2. Coronation of the Lord's Anointed
3. Victory in the Face of Defeat
4. Evening Prayer for Deliverance
5. Morning Prayer for Guidance
6. Prayer for God's Mercy
7. Wickedness Justly Rewarded
8. God's Glory and Man's Dominion
9. Praise for Victory over Enemies
10. Petition for God's Judgment
11. God Tests the Sons of Men
12. The Pure Words of the Lord
13. The Prayer for God's Answer—Now
14. The Characteristics of the Godless
15. The Characteristics of the Godly
16. Eternal Life for One Who Trusts
17. "Hide Me Under the Shadow of Your Wings"
18. Thanksgiving for Deliverance by God
19. The Works and Words of God
20. Trust Not in Chariots and Horses but in God
21. Triumph of the King
22. Psalm of the Cross
23. Psalm of the Divine Shepherd
24. Psalm of the King of Glory
25. Acrostic Prayer for Instruction
26. "Examine Me, O LORD, and Prove Me"
27. Trust in the Lord and Be Not Afraid
28. Rejoice Because of Answered Prayer
29. The Powerful Voice of God
30. Praise for Dramatic Deliverance
31. "Be of Good Courage"
32. The Blessedness of Forgiveness
33. God Considers All Man's Works
34. Seek the Lord
35. Petition for God's Intervention

36. The Excellent Lovingkindness of God
37. "Rest in the LORD"
38. The Heavy Burden of Sin
39. Know the Measure of Man's Days
40. Delight to Do God's Will
41. The Blessedness of Helping the Poor

Book Two: Psalms 42–72

42. Seek After the Lord
43. "Hope in God!"
44. Prayer for Deliverance by God
45. The Psalm of the Great King
46. "God Is Our Refuge and Strength"
47. The Lord Shall Subdue All Nations
48. The Praise of Mount Zion
49. Riches Cannot Redeem
50. The Lord Shall Judge All People
51. Confession and Forgiveness of Sin
52. The Lord Shall Judge the Deceitful
53. A Portrait of the Godless
54. The Lord Is Our Helper
55. "Cast Your Burden on the LORD"
56. Fears in the Midst of Trials
57. Prayers in the Midst of Perils
58. Wicked Judges Will Be Judged
59. Petition for Deliverance from Violent Men
60. A Prayer for Deliverance of the Nation
61. A Prayer When Overwhelmed
62. Wait for God
63. Thirst for God
64. A Prayer for God's Protection
65. God's Provision Through Nature
66. Remember What God Has Done
67. God Shall Govern the Earth
68. God Is the Father of the Fatherless
69. Petition for God to Draw Near
70. Prayer for the Poor and Needy
71. Prayer for the Aged
72. The Reign of the Messiah

Book Three: Psalms 73–89

73. The Perspective of Eternity
74. Request for God to Remember His Covenant
75. "God Is the Judge"
76. The Glorious Might of God
77. When Overwhelmed, Remember God's Greatness
78. God's Continued Guidance in Spite of Unbelief

79. Avenge the Defilement of Jerusalem
80. Israel's Plea for God's Mercy
81. God's Plea for Israel's Obedience
82. Rebuke of Israel's Unjust Judges
83. Plea for God to Destroy Israel's Enemies
84. The Joy of Dwelling with God
85. Prayer for Revival
86. "Teach Me Your Way, O LORD"
87. Glorious Zion, City of God
88. Crying from Deepest Affliction
89. Claiming God's Promises in Affliction

Book Four: Psalms 90–106

90. "Teach Us to Number Our Days"
91. Abiding in "the Shadow of the Almighty"
92. It Is Good to Praise the Lord
93. The Majesty of God
94. Vengeance Belongs Only to God
95. Call to Worship the Lord
96. Declare the Glory of God
97. Rejoice! The Lord Reigns!
98. Sing a New Song to the Lord
99. "Exalt the LORD Our God"
100. "Serve the LORD with Gladness"
101. Commitments of a Holy Life
102. Prayer of an Overwhelmed Saint
103. Bless the Lord, All You People!
104. Psalm Rehearsing Creation
105. Remember, God Keeps His Promises
106. "We Have Sinned"

Book Five: Psalms 107–150

107. God Satisfies the Longing Soul
108. Awake Early and Praise the Lord
109. Song of the Slandered
110. The Coming of the Priest-King-Judge
111. Praise for God's Tender Care
112. The Blessings of Those Who Fear God
113. The Condescending Grace of God
114. In Praise for the Exodus
115. To God Alone Be the Glory
116. Love the Lord for What He Has Done
117. The Praise of All Peoples
118. Better to Trust God than Man
119. An Acrostic in Praise of the Scriptures
120. A Cry in Distress
121. God Is Our Keeper

122. "Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem"
 123. Plea for the Mercy of God
 124. God Is on Our Side
 125. Trust in the Lord and Abide Forever
 126. "Sow in Tears ... Reap in Joy"
 127. Children Are God's Heritage
 128. Blessing on the House of the God-Fearing
 129. Plea of the Persecuted
 130. "My Soul Waits for the Lord"
 131. A Childlike Faith
 132. Trust in the God of David
 133. Beauty of the Unity of the Brethren
 134. Praise the Lord in the Evening
 135. God Has Done Great Things!
 136. God's Mercy Endures Forever
 137. Tears in Exile
 138. God Answered My Prayer
 139. "Search Me, O God"
 140. Preserve Me from Violence
 141. "Set a Guard, O LORD, over My Mouth"
 142. "No One Cares for My Soul"
 143. "Teach Me to Do Your Will"
 144. "What Is Man?"
 145. Testify to God's Great Acts
 146. "Do Not Put Your Trust in Princes"
 147. God Heals the Brokenhearted
 148. All Creation Praises the Lord
 149. "The LORD Takes Pleasure in His People"
 150. "Praise the LORD"
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Types of Psalms

The book of Psalms is a collection of prayers, poems, and hymns that focus the worshiper's thoughts on God in praise and adoration. Parts of the book were used as a hymnal in the worship services of ancient Israel. The book contains 150 individual psalms, which may be grouped into the following types or categories.

1. Individual and communal lament psalms, or prayers for God's deliverance. Psalms of the type are 3–7; 12; 13; 22; 25–28; 35; 38–40; 42–44; 51; 54–57; 59–61; 63; 64; 69–71; 74; 79; 80; 83; 85; 86; 88; 90; 102; 109; 120; 123; 130; and 140–143. These psalms speak to believers in moments of desperation and despair, when our need is for God's deliverance.

2. Thanksgiving psalms, consisting of praise to God for His gracious acts. This theme occurs in Psalms 8; 18; 19; 29; 30; 32–34; 36; 40; 41; 66; 103–106; 111; 113; 116; 117; 124; 129; 135; 136; 138; 139; 146–148; and 150. Every prayer we utter should include the element of thanksgiving. These psalms make us aware of God's blessings and lead us to express our thanks with feeling and conviction.

3. Enthronement psalms, which describe God's sovereign rule. Psalms of this type are 47; 93; and 96–99. Through these psalms we acknowledge God as powerful Creator and sovereign Lord over all His creation.

4. Pilgrimage psalms, which were sung by worshipers as they traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish festivals. Pilgrimage psalms are 43; 46; 48; 76; 84; 87; and 120–134. These psalms can help us establish a mood of reverent worship.

5. Royal psalms, which portray the reign of the earthly king, as well as of the heavenly King of Israel. This theme is evident in Psalms 2; 18; 20; 21; 45; 72; 89; 101; 110; 132; and 144. These psalms can make us aware of our daily need to make Christ the sovereign ruler of our lives.

6. Wisdom psalms, which instruct the worshiper in the way of wisdom and righteousness. Individual wisdom psalms are 1; 37; and 119. These psalms are especially appropriate in times of decision when we are searching for God's will and direction in our lives.

7. Imprecatory psalms, in which the worshiper invokes God's wrath and judgment against his enemies. This theme occurs in Psalms 7; 35; 40; 55; 58; 59; 69; 79; 109; 137; 139; and 144. These psalms can help us be honest about our feelings toward people who have done us wrong and work our way through these feelings to a point of forgiveness.

Images of God in the Psalms

<i>Images of God as</i>	<i>Reference in Psalms</i>
Shield	3:3; 28:7; 119:114
Rock	18:2; 42:9; 95:1
King	5:2; 44:4; 74:12
Shepherd	23:1; 80:1
Judge	7:11
Refuge	46:1; 62:7
Fortress	31:3; 71:3
Avenger	26:1
Creator	8:1, 6
Deliverer	37:39, 40
Healer	30:2
Protector	5:11
Provider	78:23–29
Redeemer	107:2

Messianic Psalms

Many of the psalms specifically anticipate the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, who came centuries later as the promised Messiah. The messianic prophecies in the psalms take a variety of forms and refer to Christ in a variety of ways. (1) Typical Messianic. The subject of the psalm is in some respects a type of Christ (see, e.g., Pss. 34:20; 69:4, 9). (2) Typical

Prophetic. The psalmist uses language to describe his present experience, which points beyond his own life and becomes historically true only in Christ (e.g., Ps. 22). (3) Indirectly Messianic. At the time of composition the psalm refers to a king or the house of David in general but awaits final fulfillment in Christ (e.g., Pss. 2; 45; 72). (4) Purely Prophetic. Refers solely to Christ without reference to any other son of David (e.g., Ps. 110). (5) Enthronement. Anticipates the coming of Yahweh and the consummation of His kingdom, which will be fulfilled in the person of Christ (e.g., Pss. 96–99).

Psalm	Portrayal	Fulfilled
2:7	The Son of God	Matthew 3:17
8:2	Praised by children	Matthew 21:15, 16
8:6	Ruler of all	Hebrews 2:8
16:10	Rises from death	Matthew 28:7
22:1	Forsaken by God	Matthew 27:46
22:7, 8	Derided by enemies	Luke 23:35
22:16	Hands and feet pierced	John 20:27
22:18	Lots cast for clothes	Matthew 27:35, 36
34:20	Bones unbroken	John 19:32, 33, 36
35:11	Accused by false witnesses	Mark 14:57
35:19	Hated without cause	John 15:25
40:7, 8	Delights in God's will	Hebrews 10:7
41:9	Betrayed by a friend	Luke 22:47
45:6	The eternal King	Hebrews 1:8
68:18	Ascends to heaven	Acts 1:9-11
69:9	Zealous for God's house	John 2:17
69:21	Given vinegar and gall	Matthew 27:34
109:4	Prays for enemies	Luke 23:34
109:8	His betrayer replaced	Acts 1:20
110:1	Rules over His enemies	Matthew 22:44
110:4	A priest forever	Hebrews 5:6
118:22	The chief stone of God's building	Matthew 21:42
118:26	Comes in the name of the Lord	Matthew 21:9

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