

An Introduction to the Psalms

TERMINOLOGY

- Psalm: from the Greek *psallo* meaning “sing”
- Psalter: the collection of Psalms = Book of Psalms
- Tehillim: the Hebrew term for the Book of Psalms; means “praise”

CHARACTERISTICS OF PSALMS

- Musical: The psalms were meant to be sung or accompanied by musical instruments
- Parallelism: (This is true..., and this also is true.) The parallel phrase may be nearly identical to the first, a sharpening of it, progress the thought of it, provide a contrast to it, or be the opposite of it.
- Repetition: Use of a repeated refrain (Ps 136)
- Imagery: Use of word pictures
- Acrostics: Using the letters of the alphabet to order the psalm (25, 37, 111, 112, 119)

AUTHORSHIP OF THE PSALMS

- The majority are attributed to David (at least 73 of them), but Asaph and the “sons of Korah” also have many included. In addition to many anonymous psalms, we also find ones attributed to Moses, Ethan, and Heman the Ezrahite.
- Other psalms in the Bible: Exodus 15, Numbers 21.17-18, Judges 5, Luke 1.46-55 (Magnificat), Luke 1.68-79 (Benedictus), Luke 2.29-32 (Nunc Dimittis)

THE BOOK OF PSALMS

- Introduction: 1-2
- Book I: 3-41 (David Psalms)
- Book II: 42-72 (Korah Psalms: 42-29; David Psalms:51-71)
- Book III: 73-89 (Asaph Psalms: 73-83)
- Book IV: 90-106
- Book V: 107-145 (David Psalms: 108-110; Acrostic Torah Psalm: 119; Pilgrimage Songs: 120-134; David Psalms: 138-145)
- Conclusion: 146-150

TYPES OF PSALMS

- Laments- An expression of grief, pain, loss, incomprehension, confusion, or dissatisfaction directed to God. More psalms fall into this category than into any other.
 - Individual Laments: 13, 22, 31, 77, ...
 - Pertaining to an unjust accusation: 3, 4, 5, 7, 11, 25, 26,27, 140, 141
 - Repentance for personal sins: 51, 130
 - Illness or incapacity: 6, 38, 39, 88
 - Community Laments: 74, 80, 90, ...
 - National emergencies: 12, 44, 58, 60
 - Plague, drought, famine, or other natural threats: 85, 126
- Thanksgiving- An expression of joy and thankfulness to God in response to some gracious act of God.
 - Individual Thanksgiving: 18, 30, 32, 34, 66
 - Community Thanksgiving: 65, 67, 107, 124
- Praise- Praise and honor of God just because God is God
 - Individual Praise: 92, 116
 - Community Praise: 8, 103, 113, 126, 139, 145, 146
- Hymns- Songs of praise suitable for various occasions
 - Enthronement Hymns: 47, 96, 98
 - Songs of Zion: 46, 84, 87
- Wisdom- Poems giving advice about responsible living: 1, 49, 73, 112, 128
- Salvation History- Poems recounting God’s saving acts throughout history: 78, 106, 135, 136
- Songs of Trust- Expressions of trust in God’s faithfulness: 11, 16, 23, 27, 62, 63, 121, 130
- Royal Psalms- For use in royal coronations or weddings: 2, 45, 72, 89, 110
- Creation Psalms- Reflections on God’s majesty expressed through creation: 19, 33, 104
- Liturgies- Various elements of worship used by Israel: 24, 68, 107, 117, 118, 132, 13