

The Psalms are:

- **Revelation** – God speaks to us through them about himself and his plans for us. We learn the true nature of things when we study them.
- **Poetry** – They are emotionally moving because poetry sneaks around our reluctance to feel strong emotions. We are stirred when we read them.
- **Honest** – They are not always polite, nice or happy but they tell the truth about doubt during painful times. Psalms force us to grow up - to live with ambivalence and to thrive even when we can't, 'just settle it'.
- **Ancient** – These poems are as removed from us as someone in 5500 would be from a poem written today. So, understanding them will take some work.

OVERVIEW

The Hebrew Bible consists three parts: the Pentateuch, the Prophets and the Writings. This last part consists of five books known as the Poetic Books. Psalms is one of those poetic books.

The collection of 150 psalms spans 1,000 years¹ and is cited directly 116 times in the NT. Psalms are recorded during the times of the exodus (Ex.15:1-18, 21), judges (Jg.5:2-31), through the times of the kings & prophets (2Sam.1:19-27; 3:33-34; 22:2-51; 23:1-7; 1Chr.29:10-13; Isa. 5:1-7, 23:16; 26:1-6; 27:2-5; Ez.19; Hos.6:1-3 & Hab.3) and at least to the time of the exile (Ps.137).

Efforts to collect this poetry may also have begun early (e.g. the book of Jashar is mentioned in Josh.10:13 & 2Sam.1:17-27).

The material from the Qumran caves suggests that our collection of psalms may only consist of a portion of the Psalms actually written.

- Title of the book of Psalms
 - The title used in the Hebrew Bible is *T^ehillim*, meaning, "Praise Songs."
 - The LXX translation of *mizmor* is the Greek word *psalmoi* meaning, "songs to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument"
- The Message of the Psalms - 'Honest with God'
 - The Psalms are the earliest commentary we have on the Pentateuch.

- Nearly all Psalms involve an honest communication with and response to God.

- Divisions of the book
 - Overview
 - Psalms is divided into five books.
 - The first three books were probably compiled earlier than the last two.
 - There are duplicate Psalms (53 & 14; 70 & 40:13-17; 108 & 57:7-11/60:5-12).
 - By the 2nd - 3rd Century BC the following Psalms were used during the week:
Sunday - Ps.24
Monday - Ps.48
Tuesday - Ps. 82
Wednesday - Ps.94
Thursday - Ps.81
Friday - Ps.93
Sabbath Day - Ps.92
 - Different MSS show different arrangements & combinations of Psalms.
 - Books

¹ Beginning with Moses (Ps.90) and ending no later than the time of Ezra/Nehemiah (Ps.)

- **Book I** Pss.1-41
 This is probably an exclusive collection of Davidic psalms.

- **Book II** Pss. 42-72
 This consists of 31 psalms. 18 are ascribed to David, 7 to the sons of Korah² and 1 to Solomon (Ps.72) The rest are anonymous.

- **Book III** Pss. 73-89
 This consists of 17 psalms. 73-83 are by Asaph;³ 84-85, 87 are by the Sons of Korah; Ps.86 is ascribed to David; 88 to Heman the Ezrahite, and the 89 to Ethan the Ezrahite.

- **Book IV** Pss. 90-106
 This holds 17 psalms. Ps.90 is ascribed to Moses. Pss. 101 and 103 are Davidic. This book uses *Yahweh* exclusively.

- **Book V** Pss. 107-150
 This contains 44 psalms. 15 are ascribed to David, and the 127th to Solomon.

² Probably the group appointed over the service of worship by David. They were survivors of God's judgment (see Nu.16 & 26:11). According to Anderson, "They were gatekeepers from Moses to David (1 Chr 9:19; 26:1-19). This seems to fit Ps 84:11. They had become renowned in helping David (1 Chr 12:6), and were appointed over the service of worship (1 Chr 6:31-32; 25). 2 Chr 20:19, in the time of Jehoshaphat, seems to be the last time they are heard of. However, Psalm 87, with the mention of Babylon (and possibly Psalm 85?), appears to be at least exilic. N. H. Ridderbos assumes that the sons of Korah did return after the exile since "the sons of the gatekeepers" are mentioned as such (Ezek 2:42 et al.). This seems likely. Note that Heman the singer in the time of David stemmed from Korah (through Abiasaph, 1 Chronicles 6). So it seems some of the sons of Korah were gatekeepers, and some (through Heman?) were singers (*ergo* 2 Chr 20:19). Asaph the singer stemmed from Gershon (through Libni). The sons of Heman and Asaph together are identified as singers (1 Chr 6:33-48; 2 Chr 5:12). The sons of Asaph are sometimes identified as *the* singers (Ezra 2:41; 3:10-11; Neh 7:44; 11:17,22; and perhaps 12:46). But this designation does not necessarily seem to exclude the Korahite line of Heman (2 Chr 35:15). Given that the sons of Korah are never referred to by name in Ezra/Nehemia, but only as "the gatekeepers," it may not be out of place to understand singers from their line being subsumed under "the sons of Asaph."

³ Anderson suggests that this is, "...a chief among the singers appointed under David (1 Chr 15:16ff.; 16:4-7,37; 25:1ff.) (cf. 1 Chr 25:1-2). He appears to have been an important author of psalms (cf. 2 Chr 29:30)."

AUTHORSHIP

- Overview
 - The Psalm text itself doesn't typically indicate authorship.
 - 34 Psalms have no authorship indicators in the MT but the LXX has titled all but the 1st two Psalms.
 - 2/3 of the Psalms have been ascribed to David
 - If authorship is indicated it is contained in an associated title.
 - These associated titles are ancient.
 - Concerning the term *lamed*:
 - The term *lamed*, most often, refers to authorship (e.g. Hab.3:1, Ps.18:1).
 - The NT seems to view *lamed* as a reference to authorship (e.g. Matt 22:41-45; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44 (Psalm 110); Acts 1:16-17 (Psalm 41); 2:25-34 (Psalms 16 and 110); Rom 4:6-8 (Psalm 32); Rom 11:9f (Psalm 69); Heb 4:7 (Psalm 95 following LXX).
 - However, *lamed* coupled with a personal name doesn't always suggest authorship (e.g. Ps.39:1)
 - For some time scholars tended to believe that many or most psalms were post-exilic for theoretical reasons. Recent analysis makes it pretty clear that the language and phraseology of the Psalms is much more ancient than found during the Maccabean period, however.⁴ Thus, today, except for 137, most of the Psalms are thought to be pre-exilic.
- Davidic Psalms

Some have denied that that David wrote many of the Psalms ascribed to him but:

 - he wrote Ps.18 (see 2 Sam.22:2-51)
 - he was a poet (2Sam.23:2-51; 2Sam.1:19-27, 3:33-34, 23:2-7)
 - he was a musician (1Sam.16:18,23; 2Sam.6:5; Neh.12:36,46; Amos 6:5; 2Sam.23:1)
 - he founded and organized the Temple music (1Chron.15:16-24; 16:7,31; 25:1; Ez.3:10; Neh.12:24, 46)
 - he founded Hebrew psalmody (Neh.12:24, 36,46)

| Author | Book 1 (1-41) | Book 2 (42-72) | Book 3 (73-89) | Book 4 (90-106) | Book 5 (107-150) |
|------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|
| David [73] | 3-9 (10), 11-32, 34-41 | 51-65, 68-70 | 86 | 101, 103 | 108-10, 122, 124, 131, 133, 138-145 |
| Asaph [12] | | 50 | 73-83 | | |
| Sons of Korah [12] | | 42, 44-49 | 84-85, 87-88 | | |
| Solomon [2] | | 72 | | | 127 |
| Moses [1] | | | | 90 | |
| Heman the Ezrahite [1] | | | 88 | | |
| Ethan the Ezrahite [1] | | | 89 | | |

Summary Table⁵

CANONICITY

⁴ Bultmann, Moses (1938) *The Psalms, Chronologically Treated with a New Translation* & Dahood, Mitchell (1970) *Psalms* The Anchor Bible

⁵ from Bullock

The collection of Psalms we possess is ancient but hard to date. They were likely compiled at different times in Israel's history:

- During or at the end of David's life (c.f. 1Chr.23:2-6);
- Possibly during the reign of Jehosahaphat (c.f. 2Chr.17:7-9; 20:19);
- Possibly during the reign of Hezekiah (2Chr.29:25-30; Prov.25:1) and
- Possibly during the times of Ezra & Nehemiah (Neh.12:27-30, 45-47)

HEBREW POETRY⁶

What is common to Semitic poetry is the use of imagery and parallelism rather than meter and rhyme as is more typical of English poetry.

- Imagery
Imagery involves the use of simile, metaphor, mythological references or other literary devices that provide us with mental images. These images support the point the author is trying to make. The 1st Psalm is full of such images (e.g. sitting in the seat of mockers v.1; like a tree planted by the waters v. 3; like the chaff v.4). Psalm 23 is an extended metaphor that is as comforting to us as it would be to the sheep the psalmist is alluding to.
- Parallelism (e.g. Ps.20:1)

semantic parallelism

- Synonymous parallelism (e.g. Ps. 2)
 - Identical - Ps.24:1
 - Similar - Ps.19:2
- Antithetic parallelism - Ps.1:6; Prov.10:1
The thesis & antithesis are making the same point.
- Synthetic/Constructive parallelism (everything that doesn't fit the other patterns)
 - Completion (a parallelism of rhythm rather than of meaning) - Ps.2:6
 - Comparison - Prov.15:17
 - Reason - Prov.26:4
- Climactic or repetitive parallelism - Ps.29:1
- Emblematic parallelism - Prov. 25:25, 11:22, Ps. 26:2, 42:1
The use of imagery in conjunction with parallelism.
- Pivot pattern - Ps. 98:2
A clause is shared between two lines.
- Chiasm (e.g. Ps1:1,6)
The entire 2nd Psalm is a chiastic form (1-3 & 10-12)

EARTH HEAVEN
 X
HEAVEN EARTH

⁶ For additional information on Hebrew literature read the notes in the 'Literary Structure' section of your appendix handout.

grammatical parallelism

This involves the repetition of the parts of speech from one line to the next, although not necessarily in the same order. This serves to tie one line with another.

- Technical, Musical and Melody Terminology
Much of this material is obscure to us and so many of these definitions are tentative ones.⁷
 - Technical terms
 - *mizmor* - musical accompaniment
 - *shir* - vocal music
 - *maskil* - contemplative or instruction
 - *mikhtam* - a song of covering or atonement
 - *t^epillah* - prayer
 - *t^ehillah* - song of praise
 - *siggayon* - an irregular or wandering song
 - Musical terms
 - *lam-m^enasseah* - to the choir leader
 - *n^eginot* - with stringed instruments
 - *n^ehillot* - with wind instruments
 - *seminit* - with an 8-stringed lute or an octave lower than soprano
 - *^alamot* - soprano or high pitched
 - *mahalat* - song of lament
 - Melody indicators
 - *al mut lab-ben* - Death of a son
 - *al 'ayyelet has-sahar* - According to the hind of the morning
 - *Susan* or *al sosnnim* - to the lilies
 - *al tashet* - Do not destroy
 - *al Yonat elem r^ehoquim* - According to a dove of silence, those who are afar off

GENRE

- Psalms of Lament
While all the elements are not always present, these kinds of psalms often have the following form:
 - Address to God (Ps. 13:1a)
 - The complaint (Ps. 13:1-2)
 - Expression of trust (Ps. 13:5)
 - The request (Ps. 13:3-4)
 - A vow to praise, sacrifice & instruct others (Ps. 13:6)
 - If the author gets resolution then he expresses joy (Ps. 6:8-10)
- Psalms of Gratitude (Ps. 21, 23, 75, 135)
While all the elements are not always present, these kinds of psalms often have the following form:
 - Announcement of the intention to express gratitude (Ps.116:1)
 - Delineation of God's deliverance (Ps.116:3-11)
 - Conclusion (Ps.116:12-19)

⁷ This is taken from Archer

- Wisdom Psalms (e.g. Ps.1 & 73)
These psalms do not have a set form, except for the fact that they all recommend how the godly can live life skillfully in the world.
- Psalms of Praise (e.g. Ps.95 & 117)
While all the elements are not always present, these kinds of psalms often have the following form:
 - A call to praise God
 - A reason for the praise is given
The reasons are usually directed toward God's attributes or actions in history/creation.
 - A conclusion

Homework Assignment

- Review the material on Hebrew poetry & genres.
- Read Psalms (12, 27, 35, 51, 102, 120, 137, 142). These are all laments. Think about how do they differ from each other. As you read them, practice identifying the various poetic devices used by the author.
- Prepare a response to the following (i.e. you will turn this in next week):
 - Consider a time of great sadness, anger or anxiety in your life either currently or in the past and write about it using the Hebrew poetical style (note: Don't be too specific with your issue. Generalize it by focusing upon the principles involved. This way your psalm will be timeless.).⁸
 - Annotate your psalm, noting the poetical techniques you used.⁹

⁸ Please submit all written work in a type-written format (i.e. a computer print out)

⁹ You can do this through footnoting; marginal notes or by referencing line numbers as shown below:

Footnoting:

All disdain me

*Even those closest to me despise me*¹

¹ synonymous parallelism

Marginal notes:

All disdain me

Even those closest to me despise me

synonymous parallelism

Line numbers:

¹ *All disdain me*

² *Even those closest to me despise me*

Lines 1 & 2 are examples of synonymous parallelism.