

Overview of Psalms

Author & Date: The Psalms are a compilation of various praise songs or poems that were written by a number of different authors. The Psalms themselves do not identify the authors, but 101 out of 150 times the psalm titles do. The titles may have been added later and therefore may not be inspired, but are generally held as reliable. According to the titles, David wrote 73 psalms, Asaph 12 (50, 73-83), Korah's descendants 11, (42, 44-49, 84, 84, 87, 88), Solomon 1 or 2 (72?, 127), and one each by Moses (90), Heman (88), and Ethan (89).¹ (Todd Beall, Capital Bible Seminary Poetical Books class notes, 2003). Assuming an early Exodus, Psalm 90 would have been written around 1400 B.C. and the Psalms of David would be around 1000 B.C. The latest Psalms are 126 and 127 dated during the exile, probably 540 B.C.

Purpose: The book of Psalms is essentially the hymnal for the Jewish people. The Psalms are poetic in style and are easily set to music due to the metered style. The Psalms serve various purposes in that some are prayerful petitions, some are expressions of praise and thanksgiving, and others are prophetic in nature. The book of Psalms paints a wonderful portrait on how we can be honest with God and how we should also express ourselves to Him.

Broad Outline for Psalms

There is no way to real outline the book of Psalms. The book is divided into 5 "books." There is no known record as to why they are collected in these particular books. Some consider that perhaps the 5 books represent the 5 books of the law, but that is conjecture. It seems best to assume that they were collected in groups and finally put together in stages and finally into the book we know as psalms. Instead of trying to outline the book of Psalms, it is worthwhile to look at broad categories the Psalms fall into. Although some Psalms do not neatly fit into one of these categories, the list below is a good place to start.²

Praise

Thanksgiving: National (65, 66:1-12, 67, 68, 75, 76, 107, 124)

Individual (18m, 30, 34a, 40:1-10, 66:13-20, 92, 116, 118, 138)

General Praise (24, 33, 36m, 84, 95, 100, 103, 105, 111a, 113, 114, 117, 134, 135, 136, 145a, 146, 147, 149, 150)

Creation (**8M**, 19:1-6, 29, 104, 148)

Royal (**2M**, 18m, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, **110M**, **132M**, 144)

God as King (**47M**, **93M**, **96M**, **97M**, **98M**, **99M**)

Zion (48, 87, 122)

Petition

National (44, 60, 74, 79, 80, 85, 90, 94, 106, 123, 126, 129, 137m)

General (3, 5, 9a, 10a, 12, 13, 14, 17, 25a, 26, 27, 28, 31, 36m, 39, 41, 42, 43, 52-57, 61, 64, 70, 71, 77, 86, 88, 108, 120, 140-143)

Rescue (7, 35, 58, 59, **69mM**, 83, 109, 137m, 139)

Repentance (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130)

Trust (4, 11, **16M**, 23, 46, 62, 63, 91, 115, 121, 125, 131)

Instruction (1, 15, 19:7-14, 36m, 37a, 49, 73, 78, 81, 82, 112a, 119a, 127, 128, 133)

Messianic (may span other categories above 2, 8, 16, 22, 40, 47, 69, 93, 96-99, 110, 132)

(m=mixed type, a=acrostic form, **M**=Messianic)

¹ Beall, Todd S., Poetical Books, Capital Bible Seminary Class Notes, 2003).

² Ibid – this approach is adapted from the class notes of Dr. Beall

Overview of Psalms

Food For Thought

Select at least one Psalm from each grouping above and answer the following questions:

1. What is the context of the psalm? (Some psalms indicate the situation for which the song was written e.g. Psalm 51 at other times, the psalm itself seems to indicate a general occasion.)
2. What is the author's emotional state when writing the psalm (joyous, worshipful, worried, fearful, etc.)
3. What does the psalm tell us about God and His nature?
4. How does the psalm fit the category above, what other categories might the psalm fit into?
5. What are some key verses in the psalm? This could be something repeated or a transitional thought, perhaps from worry to hope?
6. For the messianic Psalms, how did (or will) Jesus fulfill the prophecy of the psalm?
7. What message does the Psalm convey and how can I apply that message to my situation today?
8. What does the Psalm teach me about how I should think about God?
9. Pick a psalm and Praise and worship God using the Psalm to guide your heart in worship.

Some suggestions to start: 1, 2, 5, 8, 19, 22, 23, 27, 34, 42, 46, 51, 66, 73, 91, 95, 100, 101, 118, 119, 121, 127, 139, 142, 150.