

# Books of The Bible

## A Survey of The Psalms

### Introduction

The book of the Psalms is to my knowledge the largest book in the Scriptures. Of the 1189 chapters in the entire Bible it has 150 Psalms. Due to its large size and since this is not an in-depth consideration of each Psalm, all one can do is present a brief survey of the book, mentioning (as I see it) the major observations and truths.

The Book of the Psalms was called by Luther and most German designations “Psalter”. Both names are evidently from the Greek word “psalmoi”. This is a term which, strictly speaking, indicates a hymn sung to a musical accompaniment. The Hebrew Bible calls it “sepher tehillim” which means the book of praise.

It is intriguing that despite David’s desire to build a house for the Lord (2 Sam. 7:1-3; 8-13), I am not aware of any Psalm that relates to his collection of materials and disappointment in not being allowed to do it (1 Chron. 22:8), nor how he was given the pattern for it (1 Chron. 28:11, 19) in any of the Psalms.

#### 1) The order:

- a) How the Psalms came to be in the present order is unknown. However, we do know that the second Psalm has always been the second Psalm for Paul in preaching in the synagogue at Antioch (Acts 13:14) said, “God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee” (Acts 13:33). Yet, two verses later (Acts 13:15) when quoting another Psalm (Psa. 16), he does not say which it was.

#### 2) We must never forget that the Psalms, by their Hebrew title “Tehillim”, means praises, and the word “psalms” is from “psallo” meaning “to play an instrument”. Compare 1 Chron. 16:4, 26:1; 2 Chron. 5:12-13. As such, they were those sung in the religious gatherings of Israel. A very broad groupings are those which have to do with calling on God in times of need; communion with God in which the deepest heart emotions are expressed; celebratory of the works of God in nature and history; both the historical history of Israel and the nation; and cogitation of the individual when facing the perplexing problems of life and divine providence.

#### 3) The terms used to describe the various Psalms:

- a) Even the most cursory reading and observation will reveal that the Psalms are not all the same genre, but depending on the environment or experience the psalmist is musing upon. They are called:
  - i) “A Psalm” - This term indicates a hymn with musical instrument
  - ii) “A Song” - This indicates a vocal piece of music
  - iii) “A prayer” - Self explanatory
  - iv) “Maschil” - The word means “instruction”, a message by the wise for the then present times.
  - v) “Michtam” - This is of unknown meaning
  - vi) “Song of Degrees” - The wording indicates “going up” and would possibly refer to that which the children of Israel sang as they wended their way to the temple. However, there are several other possible indicators as well, such as, the changing of the sun dial in Ahaz’s day (Isa. 38:8) or the songs of Hezekiah (Isa. 38:20).
  - vii) “For the chief musician” - This ought not be the superscript but rather a subscript to the previous Psalm.
  - viii) “Selah” - This would indicate a musical, not like a “rest” in music indicating the player or singer to stop, consider what has been sung or lay emphasis on a particular matter either before, or after, or both.
  - ix) “Hallelujah” - Means “Praise the Lord”.

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### Authors

The Psalms were written by an unknown number of individuals, 41 of them anonymous. There were:

- a) 3 written by the three individuals, Moses, Heman, and Ethan
- b) 10 by Hezekiah
- c) 11 by the sons of Korah as by Asaph
- d) the balance of 73 by David.

### Its Personal Characteristic

The book of the Psalms reveals in a very human way that we have a God on whom we can call in every situation of life. Whether in the valley of death, in confession of sin and guilt, in the dark ages when there is enemies on every hand, and in times of utter loneliness. God is always there and can be counted on as a closest Friend ready to give aid. He is also there biding His time to destroy and bring to nought every evil by which the ungodly seek to harm the righteous. Consequently, the book is exceedingly personal as is seen by the following occurrences in the book.

Word / Clause	No. of refs
My	545
Me	459
Deliver/ delivereth	59
Selah	71
Rejoice	54
Sing	57
Trusted	11
Trust	50

### God

There are three major Titles/Names which are revelations of God given in the Scriptures. They are what I call “trunk names”, for virtually all other names derive from these. They are “Elohim”, “Adoni”, and “Jehovah”. *(In the KJV the word “God” in capital “G” small “od” is usually the name “Elohim”; When it is “LORD” or “GOD” all captials is it normally His name “Jehovah”, and when it is “Lord” capital “L” small “ord” it is normally the name Adoni”. However, these are not hard and fast rules).* As always, in the Scriptures it is important to observe the first time each is used, either on its own or in combination with one of the other names.

- a) The first time the Hebrew name “Elohim” is used is Genesis 1:1 - “In the beginning God”.
- b) The first time “Jehovah” is used is in Genesis 2:4. It is used in connection with the name “Elohim”.
- c) The first time “Adoni” is used is in Genesis 15:2. “And Abram said, Lord God”. Abram takes the place of humble inquiry when he asks how the Lord will fulfill His promise to make him the head of a great nation.

Considering only the first manifestation of God, “Elohim” from Genesis One, it is observed that in this first impression God is seen as:

- a) Supreme over all creation

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- b) Having the ability to function nor not according to His own will
- c) His prioritizing of importance
- d) His brilliance in developing complexities
- e) His Systematic ordering

From another viewpoint another has pointed out:

Reference	The Manifestation of His Ability	
God created	Gen. 1:1, 21, 27	His power to bring into being
God made	Gen. 1:7, 16, 25, 31; 2:2, 3	His power to fashion and beautify
God moved	Gen. 1:2	His power of self activation
God said	Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 29	His power to speak and cause to be
God saw	Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31	His power to discern and appreciate
God called	Gen. 1:5, 8, 10	His power to describe and name
God divided	Gen. 1:4	His power to separate and distinguish
God set	Gen. 1:17	His power to place and keep
God ended	Gen. 2:2	His power to accomplish and complete
God blessed	Gen. 2:3	His power to enrich and sanctify.

With such a God as this, ever in control, my heart ought to know sublime peace. My biggest problems are insignificant in the promises and power of God my Father.

**Key Words:** “Worship” (15); “Praise” (160); “Call” (*as upon God*) (37); “Hearest, hear” etc. (57).

### Key Verse:

I suggest is, “O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever” (Psa. 107:1).

### Classifications

The Psalms can be classified in a variety of ways. In particular, Psalms which have a particular bent of thought. However, like the Proverbs there does not seem to be a progressive classification of them and the reason is because they were written from life's experiences. We all know that the experiences of life do not come in nice tidy little packages, that is, all the sorrows together, all the joys together, all the depressions together etc. Life is a rolling series of experiences which keep repeating themselves. For instance, many of us have stood at the grave of a loved one, then some time later we are standing at a grave again, however, the experiences the next time are not the same as the first. The person in the casket is different but the depth of our respect for them or loss at the release of them depends on our affection for them. So with the writers of the Psalms. They also had the rolling experience of life, consequently there is a choppiness of the times he cries to the Lord, wants vengeance on his enemies, drops into the depths of despair, or is on the heights of delights in the consciousness of God.

a) Some of the broad classifications are:

- i) Individual prayers for forgiveness (Psa. 25:18; 86:5); Assurance (Psa. 10:17; 22:21; 118:21);

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- Deliverance (Psa. 30:3); Lamentations, “How long” the plaintive cry in quadruple (Psa. 13:1, 2; 4:2; 6:3; 35:17; 62:3; 74:10; 79:5)
- ii) Confessional of trust (Psa. 5:11; 7:1; 9:10; 13:5; 25:2, 20; 143:8)
  - iii) Petition psalms, “Hear me, O God (Psa. 4:1; 17:6; 13:3; 38:16; 55:2; 143:7)
  - iv) Celebratory, for Coronations (Psa. 2, 72, 101, 110)
  - v) Weddings (Psa. 45)
  - vi) Before conflict (Psa. 18:20, 21, 144)
  - vii) Messianic (Psa. 2, 8, 16, 22, 24, 40, 41, 45, 68, 69, 72, 89, 91, 102, 110, 118)
  - viii) Triplicate types, such as Psalms 22, 23, 24, which deal with the Lord on the cross, holding the crook as the Shepherd, and being the Victorious Sovereign.
  - ix) Doublets, such as Psalms 1 and 2.
  - x) Historical Psalms, as in the tables below
  - xi) Imprecatory Psalms, such as Psalms 69, 109 and to a lesser extent, Psalms 5, 6, 11, 12, 35, 37, 40, 52, 54, 56, 57, 58, 59, 79, 83, 94, 137, 139, 143.

Some of the groupings are distinctly marked out for us such as, “The Songs of degrees”. Notice the heading at the top of Psalms 120-134. Furthermore, not all of them were written by David. The heading of Psalms 122, 124, 131, 133 inform us, “A song of degrees of David”; Psalm 127 heading is “A Song of Degrees for Solomon”.

### Key Concepts

Irrespective of the situation, sadness or gladness, God can turn our “ashes into beauty” (Isa. 61:3), and no matter how dark the night, “joy cometh in the morning” (Psa. 30:5).

### When Written

By taking note of the indicators as to who wrote the various Psalms, it is a reality they were not written at the same time. Moses, who wrote Psalm 90, lived some 400 years before David and some indicate a time subsequent to the Babylonish captivity (Psa. 126 & 127). That would indicate they were written over a 1000 year period.

### Aspects of The Lord

God is all His people need in every circumstance of life. He alone is their Rock, High Tower, Shield, Shepherd, and King.

The Psalms that are related to our Lord are beautiful. They describe to us something of His deepest feelings. They are Psalms 2, 8, 16, 22, 24, 40, 41, 45, 68, 69, 72, 89, 91, 102, 110, 118.

### Suggested Structure / Outline

The Psalms are, by the Holy Spirit, divided into 5 sections, each ending with an English various closing “Amen’s.

- a) “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting. Amen, and Amen” (Psa. 41:13)
- b) “Let the whole earth be filled with His glory; Amen, and Amen” (Psa. 72:19)
- c) “Blessed be the Lord for evermore. Amen, and Amen” (Psa. 89:52)
- d) “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting: and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the Lord” (Psa. 106:48)
- e) “Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord” (Psa. 150:6)

When considering the structure or outline of the Psalms I know of nothing better than that by A.G. Clarke. This beloved child of God was taken captive, and when in a Japanese interment camp and other like places, found the Psalms to be of great comfort and strength. His book, “Analytical Studies in the Psalms”, is in my estimation one of the very best. His outline is as follows:

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- a) Book 1 Psalms 1-41
  - i) Revelation of the divine Ruler, Psalms 1-8
  - ii) Response of the despised remnant, Psalms 9-15
  - iii) Record of the Divine Redeemer, Psalms 16-41
- b) Book 2 Psalms 42-72 Israel's ruin and redemption
  - i) Deliverance of the exiled remnant, Psalms 42-51
  - ii) Disclosures concerning the enemy reprobate, Psalms 53-60
  - iii) Dominion of the enthroned Redeemer, Psalms 61-72
- c) Book 3 Psalms 73-89 Israel's return and restoration
  - i) Revelation of the divine holiness, Psalms 73-83
  - ii) Realization of the divine holiness, Psalms 84-89
- d) Book 4 Psalms 90-106 Israel's relapse and recovery
  - i) Recognition of the covenant relationship, The Person of the Redeemer, Psalms 90-93
  - ii) Revelation of the covenant relationship, the Presence of the Redeemer, Psalms 94-100
  - iii) Rejoicing in the divine covenant, the praise for the Redeemer, Psalms 101-106
- e) Book 5 Psalms 107-150
  - i) The ways of God retraced in the national history, Psalms 107-112
  - ii) The ways of God recalled in national homage, Psalms 113-118
  - iii) The word of God revered by the loyal heart, Psalm 119
  - iv) The ways of God recalled in the national homecoming, Psalms 120-134
  - v) The ways of God retraced in national history, Psalms 135-145
  - vi) The worship of God rendered in universal harmony, Psalms 146-150

### Backgrounds for some of the Psalms

The following is a list of the Psalms which, in the superscription, indicate an historical event. Besides these there are others such as Psalms 8, 23, 24, 45 which could refer to an historical happening.

- a) Psalm 127:1 would indicate the building of the temple in the time of peace under Solomon.
- b) Psalm 132:13-14 would indicate God's pleasure in Zion where the temple was.
- c) The following Psalms have inscriptions indicating historical events:

Psalm	Historical event	O T Reference
Psa. 3	When David fled from Absalom	2 Sam. 15:13-17:22
Psa. 18	When the Lord delivered David from his enemies and Saul	2 Sam. 22:1
Psa. 30	At the dedication of the house of the Lord under Solomon	1 Kgs. 8:1-66
Psa. 34:1	When David changed his behavior before Abimelech	1 Sam 21:13
Psa. 51	When David sinned with Bathsheba	2 Sam. 11:1-4
Psa. 52	When Doeg told Saul where David was	1 Sam. 21:7; 22:9

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<b>Psalm</b>	<b>Historical event</b>	<b>O T Reference</b>
Psa. 54	When the Ziphites came and asked Saul concerning David hiding himself with them	1 Sam. 23:19; 26:1
Psa. 56	When David went to Gath	1 Sam. 27:1-12
Psa. 57 & 142	When David fled and hid in the cave	1 Sam. 22:1-5
Psa. 59	When Saul sent men to watch the house so as to kill him	1 Sam. 19:11
Psa. 63	When he was in the wilderness of Judah	1 Sam. 23:14

### Psalms without an inscription but which may indicate an historical event

- 1) After his sin with Bathsheba or when he had played the fool - Psa. 25:18; 86:5
- 2) Assurance - Psa. 10:17; 22:21; 118:21
- 3) Deliverance - Psa. 30:3

### Psalms quoted in the New Testament which relate to Messiah

Psa. 2:1-2	Acts 4:25-28
Psa. 2:7	Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5
Psa. 2:9	Rev. 2:26-27; 12:5; 19:15
Psa. 8:2	Matt. 21:16
Psa. 8:4-6	1 Cor. 15:25-28; Heb. 2:5-10
Psa. 16:8-11	Acts 2:25-32; 13:34-37
Psa. 22:1	Matt. 27:46, Mk. 15:34
Psa. 22:7-8	Matt. 27:39, 43; Lk. 23:35
Psa. 22:18	Matt. 27:35; Mk. 15:24; Lk. 23:34; Jn. 19:23-24
Psa. 22:22	Heb. 2:11-12
Psa. 40:6-8	Heb. 10:5-10
Psa. 41:9	Jn. 13:18
Psa. 45:6-7	Heb. 1:8-9
Psa. 68:18	Eph. 4:8
Psa. 69:4	Jn. 15:25

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Psa. 69:9	Jn. 2:17; Rom. 15:3
Psa. 69:21	Matt. 27:34; Jn. 19:28-29
Psa. 69:22-23	Rom. 11:9-10
Psa. 69:25	Acts 1:20
Psa. 78:2	Matt. 13:35
Psa. 78:24	Jn. 6:31
Psa. 97:7	Heb. 1:6
Psa. 102:25-27	Heb. 1:10-12
Psa. 110:1	Matt. 22:44; Mk. 12:36; Lk. 20:42; Acts 2:34; Heb. 1:13
Psa. 110:4	Heb. 5:6; 6:20; 7:17, 21
Psa. 118:6	Heb. 13:6
Psa. 118:22-23	Matt. 21:42; Mk. 12:10-11; Lk. 20:17; Acts 4:11; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:7
Psa. 118:26	Matt. 21:9; 23:39; Mk. 11:9; Lk. 13:35; 19:38; Jn. 12:13

### Omissions

Not all the Psalms of the scriptures are included in the book of Psalms

<b>Other Psalms in the Bible</b>	
Deut. 32	Moses's song approaching the promised land
Judg. 5	Deborah's song at the Canaanites' defeat
1 Sam. 2	Hannah's prayer at Samuel's dedication
2 Sam. 22	David's song when delivered from Saul (Psa. 18)
Lk. 1:45-55	Mary's song when she visited Elizabeth
Lk. 1:67-79	Zachariah's prophecy at the birth of his son John
Rev. 5	The elders' song in the vision of the throne

**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.  
John 16:13**

Rowan Jennings, Abbotsford, British Columbia