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THE PSALMS

*Israel's songbook for the public worship*

SETTING

Approx. 1020 - 539 BC

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## INTRODUCTION

The psalms are people's words to God that have become part of God's words to us so that they shape how we relate to God. The book of Psalms is important because:

1. It sweeps over the entire narrative of the Bible and functions as a "mini-Bible".
2. The psalms are applicable to all aspects of life.
3. It was the songbook of Jesus - because profoundly the psalms also are about Jesus.

David is the author of 73 of the 150 psalms, and 13 of them are called "historical" because they also describe the historical situation in which they were created. But it was not only David who wrote psalms. 12 of them were written by Asaph, and 11 by the Korah singers (possibly the sons), all of whom were Levites mentioned in the books of Chronicles in connection with the temple and worship. Solomon wrote two, Moses is linked to one, and Ethan the Ezrahite wrote one. The rest are anonymous. The book of Psalms was created over a long period, from David’s time to their exile in Babylon.

They are different types of hymns. About a third are laments (e.g., Psalms 3). The rest can be called praise psalms (e.g., Psalms 8, 117), thanksgiving psalms (e.g., Psalms 18), royal psalms (e.g., Psalms 2, 110), and wisdom psalms (e.g., Psalms 1, 119).

The Psalms are poetry, and poetry in the Bible has "parallelisms" as a distinctive feature. We have synonymous parallelisms, where two lines express the same thing, as in Psalm 33:9:

*"He spoke, and it came to pass;*

*he commanded, and it was written."*

We find opposite (antithetical) parallelisms, e.g., in Psalm 1:6, where two lines say the same thing, but with the opposite "sign":

*"For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,*

*but the way of the wicked leads to destruction."*

And we have so-called "chiasms", e.g., an ABBA construction as in Psalm 124:7:

*"We have escaped like a bird*

*from the fowler’s snare;*

*the snare has been broken,*

*and we have escaped."*

### There is much in the Psalms that points to Jesus:

* Son of God: Psalm 2:7 (Acts 13:33, Heb 1:5)
* The Resurrection: Psalm 16:10 (Acts 13:35-37)
* Despised: Psalm 22 (Luke 23, Matt 27)
* Lord, seated at God's right hand: Psalm 110
* King and priest: Psalm 110
* The stone that was broken away: Psalm 118:22 (e.g., Acts 4:11)

One of the most difficult things about the Psalms is the "vengeful" Psalms, such as Psalms 35, 58, and 137. Perhaps the following points can help:

1. It is important to remember that these were created in a completely different culture. In the culture of the Bible, feelings had to be exaggerated to be real. It's more about the despair and anger than the punishment.
2. The authors are also concerned with God's cause, His name and justice - not their own. There is no question of personal revenge, which was forbidden in the Law of Moses anyway. When David talks about himself, it is mostly because he is God's anointed and God's representative. The authors turn the matter over to God and ask Him to intervene. The joy lies in God's righteousness and salvation, not their own.
3. Perhaps these adversaries will not repent anyway, as in 58:5-6.
4. They get to taste their own medicine (35:1,7-8). Psalm 137 describes common warfare, which had been done against them by the Babylonians. Some of this is still done today. They pray that God will repay the evil that has been done.

How can these words spoken *to* God function as words *from* God to us?

They are part of the Bible for us to do more than just read them. We need to let them become a part of us so that they can shape how we relate to God.

God's way of showing us how to devote ourselves to Him. God's word to us in specific life situations.

## WHY ARE THE PSALMS IMPORTANT?

### 1. They are a “mini-Bible”

Gives an overview of the history of salvation from creation, via Mount Sinai, the tent of meeting, the temple, the kingdom, and the exile - and points forward to the Messiah who will come with salvation and renewal of everything.

About how God shows himself in nature, what he is like, what man is like, and about sin.

*“The hymns prepare and train you for every spiritual, social and emotional state. They show you what the dangers are, what you should keep in mind, what your attitude should be, how you can talk to God about it, and how you can get the help you need from God.”* Tim Keller

The psalms help us see God as he is and not as we want him to be.

### 2. The psalms are applicable to all aspects of life.

Helps us get the right perspective

*“A medicine cabinet for the heart and the best practical guide for life.”* Tim Keller

Helps you express yourself through prayer.

The main types of psalms

1. Psalms of praise (e.g., 8 and 117)
2. Lamentations (e.g., 3 and 13)
3. Psalms of thanksgiving (e.g., 18 and 30)
4. Royal psalms (e.g., 2 and 110)
5. Psalms of wisdom (e.g., 1 and 119)

**"Penal Psalms" (e.g., 35 and 58)**

* Culture: Emotions had to be formulated intensely to be real.
* The authors are concerned with God's cause, His name and justice - not their own. Not personal revenge.
* The opposers are not going to repent anyway. (58:5-6)
* They get a taste of their own medicine. (35:1, 7-8)
* The writers turn the matter over to God and ask Him to intervene.
* The joy lies in God's justice and salvation, not their own.

### 3. The Songbook of Jesus

The Psalms are also about Jesus. Mostly about Him, since the whole Bible is about Him. They are songs *to* Jesus and songs *about* Jesus.

## AUTHORS

* David: 73 (+ 2 in NT)
* The sons/singers of Korah: 11
* Asaph: 12
* Solomon: 2
* Moses: 1
* Anonymous: 49

## PARALLELISMS ("THOUGHT RHYME")

**Synonyms**

Psalm 33:9: *“For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.”*

**Opposite meaning**

Psalm 1:6: *“For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.”*

Psalm 124:6-8 (“X structure”):

A. Blessed is the Lord who did not give us prey to their teeth!

B. We broke free like the bird

C. from the hunter's snare.

C. Snare smoke

B. and we went free.

A. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

## JESUS IN THE PSALMS

**Son of God: Psalm 2:7 (Acts 13:33, Heb 1:5)**

*“I will proclaim the Lord’s decree: He said to me, “You are my son; today I have become your father.”* Psalm 2:7

*"As it is written in the second Psalm: “‘You are my son; today I have become your father.’"* Acts 13:33

*"For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father”?"* Heb 1:5

**The resurrection: Psalm 16:10 (Acts 13:35-37)**

*“because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay.”* Psalm 16:10

*"So it is also stated elsewhere: “‘You will not let your holy one see decay.’ “Now when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his ancestors and his body decayed. 37 But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay."* Acts 13:35-37

**Despised: Psalm 22 (Luke 23, Matt 27)**

*“But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads.”* Psalm 22:6-7

*"Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him."* Luke 23:11

*"But the whole crowd shouted, “Away with this man!"* Luke 23:18a

*"They all answered, “Crucify him!”* Matt 27:22b

*"Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. “Hail, king of the Jews!” they said. They* *spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again."* Matt 27:29b-30a

**Lord, seated at God's right hand: Psalm 110**

*"The Lord says to my lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'"* Psalm 110:1

**King and priest: Psalm 110**

*"The Lord will extend your mighty scepter from Zion, saying, 'Rule in the midst of your enemies!'"* Psalm 110:2

*"The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek. '"* Psalm 110:4

**The stone that was rejected: Psalm 118:22 (e.g., Acts 4:11)**

*"The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;"* Psalm 118:22

*"Jesus is “‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’"* Acts 4:11