

# 2022 ETDS

## Psalms

9 (ב) בַּמָּה יִזְכֶּה נַעַר אֶת-אָרְחוֹ לְשֹׁמֵר<sup>a</sup> כְּדַבְּרֶךָ<sup>b</sup> :

10 בְּכָל-לִבִּי<sup>a</sup> דַּרְשָׁתִּיךָ אֵל-אֲשַׁנְּנִי מִמְצוֹתֶיךָ :

11 בְּלִבִּי צַפְנֹתִי אִמְרֹתֶיךָ<sup>a</sup> לְמַעַן לֹא אֶחֱטֵא-לָךְ :

12 בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה לְמַדְּנִי<sup>a</sup> חֻקֶּיךָ :

13 בְּשִׁפְתֵי סִפְרֹתַי כָּל מִשְׁפָּטֵי-פִיךָ<sup>a</sup> :

14 בְּדַרְךָ עֲדוֹתֶיךָ שִׁשְׁתִּי כַּעַל<sup>a</sup> כָּל-הוֹן :

15 בְּפִקְדֵיךָ אֲשִׁיחָה וְאִבִּיטָה אֲרַחֲתֶיךָ :

16 בְּחֻקֶּיךָ<sup>a</sup> אֲשַׁתְּעֶשֶׂע לֹא אֲשַׁכַּח דְּבַרְךָ<sup>b</sup> :

17 (ג) גָּמַל עַל-עֲבֹדֶךָ אֲתִיָּה<sup>a</sup> וְאֲשַׁמְרָה דְּבַרְךָ<sup>b</sup> :

18 גַּל-עֵינַי וְאִבִּיטָה נִפְלְאוֹת מִתּוֹרֹתֶיךָ :

19 גֵּר אֲנֹכִי בָאָרֶץ<sup>a</sup> אֵל-תִּסְתַּר מִפְּנֵי מִצּוֹתֶיךָ :

20 גִּרְסָה נִפְשִׁי לְתַאֲבָה אֵל-מִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ בְּכָל-עֵת :

21 וְנַעֲרַת זָרִים<sup>a</sup> אַרְוִרִים הַשְּׂגִימִם<sup>b</sup> מִמְצוֹתֶיךָ :

22 גַּל<sup>a</sup> מִעָלַי חֲרַפָּה וּבֹזֵב<sup>b</sup> כִּי עֲדַתֶיךָ נִצַּרְתִּי :

23 גַּם יֵשְׁבוּ שָׂרִים<sup>a</sup> בֵּי<sup>b</sup> נְדָבְרוּ עֲבֹדֶךָ יִשְׁיַח בְּחֻקֶּיךָ :

24 גַּם-עֲדַתֶיךָ שַׁעֲשְׁעִי אֲנִשִּׁי עֲצָתִי<sup>a</sup> :

25 (ד) דַּבְּקָה לְעַפְרָה נִפְשִׁי חֲתִינִי כְּדַבְּרֶךָ<sup>a</sup> :

26 דַּרְכֵי<sup>a</sup> סִפְרֹתַי וְתַעֲנִנִי לְמַדְּנִי חֻקֶּיךָ :

27 דַּרְךְ-פִּקְוֵיךָ הִבִּינִנִי וְאֲשִׁיחָה בְּנִפְלְאוֹתֶיךָ :

COVER: Psalm 119:9-27

Notice that each line of verses 9-16 begins with the letter ב (*bet*), and each line of verses 17-24 begins with ג (*gimel*). See “Acrostic Psalms,” page 13.

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# Introduction to the Psalms

*Stephen Rouse*

**Text:** The Book of Psalms

**Introduction:** Why Study Psalms?

## I. The Importance of the Psalms

### A. Biblical Knowledge

#### 1. Psalms as Inspired Scripture

- a. Sometimes the inspiration of the Psalms is called into question, often because of the shocking nature of the imprecatory/cursing Psalms.
  - 1) These doubts are articulated by C. S. Lewis (who does hold to the inspiration of the Psalms), commenting on the cursing Psalms: “One way of dealing with these terrible or (dare we say?) contemptible Psalms is simply to leave them alone. But unfortunately, the bad parts will not “come away clean”; they may, as we have noticed, be intertwined with the most exquisite things. And if we still believe that all Holy Scripture is “written for our learning” or that the age-old use of the Psalms in Christian worship was not entirely contrary to the will of God, and if we remember that Our Lord’s mind and language were clearly steeped in the Psalter, we shall prefer, if possible, to make some use of them.” (Lewis 21-22)
  - 2) “The most notorious difficulty is the strong language of anger which some of the psalmists use, As previously noted, the psalmists are honest, even brutally frank with God, and occasionally they blast their enemies in a way that Christians feel is out of character with the God that they knew through Jesus Christ.” (Longman, *How to Read*, 14)
- b. Jesus and the New Testament writers routinely cite the Psalms as inspired Scripture. A few notable examples:
  - 1) Jesus: “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” (**Luke 24:44**)
    - a) Note here the three-part division of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament): Law of Moses, Prophets, and the Psalms. The Psalms were the first book in the “Writings,” the third section in the Jewish organization of the Old Testament Scriptures.
  - 2) Peter: “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas... For it is written in the Book of Psalms...” (proceeds to quote **Ps 69:25** and **109:8**) (**Acts 1:16-20**)

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- a) The second of these references (**Ps 109:8**) is notable because it comes from a particularly strong imprecatory passage (**Ps 109:6-15**). It is difficult language for us, yet its inspiration is never called into question by the New Testament writers.
  - 3) The Jerusalem disciples' prayer: "...through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit..." (proceeds to quote from **Ps 2:1-2**) (**Acts 4:25-26**)
  - c. In the Psalms we find the God-breathed words of Scripture, and must wrestle with them as such.
2. Psalms as Theology
- a. The Psalms are both a message *to* God and a message *from* God.
    - 1) The Psalms were described as a a "mirror of the soul" by Athanasius (c.296-373), who is quoted as saying, "They appear to me a mirror of the soul of everyone who sings them; they enable him to perceive his own emotions, and to express them in the words of the Psalms. He who hears them read receives them as if they were spoken for him." (Tholuck, 4)
    - 2) The Psalms also contain inspired messages both *about* God and *from* God's own mouth.
      - a) "Voice of God" Psalms (Psalms in which God speaks in the first person) include: **2, 12, 27, (29), (35), 46, 50, 60, 68, 75, 81, 82, (87), 89, 90, 91, 95, 105, 108, 110, 132**
        - 1. Psalms in parenthesis above are either about the voice of God (though God does not speak in the first person) or have an oblique connection to God speaking.
      - b) **1 Chr 25:1** mentions that the leaders of the temple worship "prophesied with lyres, with harps, and with cymbals." God Himself was speaking through these musicians and their compositions.
      - c) The Psalms are a vital resource to understand the kind of God that Yahweh reveals Himself to be:
        - 1. A God who created all things and deserves our praise & devotion
        - 2. A God who listens to and answers prayer.
        - 3. A God who is deeply moved by human suffering and provides refuge for the helpless
        - 4. A God who ultimately blesses the righteous and judges the wicked
        - 5. A God who *does* allow confusing, painful things to happen to the righteous
        - 6. A God who is sovereign and answers prayer according to His own purpose and timing
    - 3) There is a balance in the wisdom literature (Job through Song of Solomon) about the nature of how God runs the world.

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- a) On one hand, the book of Proverbs gives us principles for wise, righteous living.
1. For example: “An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips, but the righteous escapes from trouble.” (**Prov 12:13**) This is a wise observation, and almost always true. However, it is not an iron-clad rule with no exceptions.
  2. If all we ever read is the book of Proverbs, we would quickly become disillusioned with its application in this broken world. Things do not always go well with the righteous. Job and his friends all suffered from a shallow application of Proverbs-like principles. There is more to the way God runs the world.
- b) On the other extreme we have the book of Ecclesiastes, which gives us raw, brutally honest observations about the way life goes “under the sun.”
1. For example: “Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all.” (**Ecc 9:11**)
  2. If all we ever read was Ecclesiastes, we might think that living a righteous, wise life might not matter very much—we’re all going to die anyway. Vanity of vanities!
- c) In the other wisdom books, particularly Psalms and Job, we find the tension between these two extremes. We find the tension trying to trust God in a confusing world where the righteous still suffer.
1. The Psalms exhibit this tension in many places, but one example is **Psalms 73**, where Asaph laments how the wicked seem to prosper, while he suffers while trying to live righteously: “Behold, these are the wicked; / always at ease, they increase in riches. / All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. / For all the day long I have been stricken / and rebuked every morning.” (**Ps 73:12-14**) Yet Asaph finds consolation and perspective after coming into the sanctuary of God (**v16-17**), and the remainder of the Psalm turns to jubilant praise (**v18-28**).
  2. The Psalms openly display the confusion and frustration (sometimes with God Himself) at trying to “live a Proverbs life in an Ecclesiastes world.” And yet at the same time the Psalms keep coming back to an unyielding trust in a God who answers prayers and keeps His promises, albeit in a different time and way than the psalmist might expect.
  3. If we read all of the wisdom literature together, we can appreciate the balanced view of God which they present as a whole. This will keep us from warped thinking about God and the way He runs the world—an error all too prevalent in both ancient and modern times.

### 3. Psalms as Biblical History

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- a. The Psalms provide illuminating connections when studied alongside the historical books, particularly the life of David.
    - 1) While books like 1-2 Samuel record the events in David's life, when we read the Psalms that correspond to those events, David's heart comes exploding off the page!
      - a) One especially strong connection is that the text of **Psalm 18** is duplicated almost entirely in **2 Sam 22**, including the title.
    - 2) There are entire Psalms dedicated to the retelling of Israel's history (**Ps 78, & 105-106** for example), which give poetic renderings of the Exodus, the wilderness, the judges, etc.
      - a) These retellings often serve different purposes. **Psalm 105** tells Israel's history with a focus on God's faithfulness to them. **Psalm 106** follows up with the same history, but focusing on Israel's unfaithfulness to God.
    - 3) There are also Psalms that are more subtle reflections on sections of the historical books. A few examples:
      - a) **Psalm 2, 89, and 132** are each a meditation on God's promises to David in **2 Sam 7**.
      - b) **Psalm 103** is a meditation on God's revelation of His character to Moses in **Ex 34:6-7**.
      - c) **Psalm 104** is a meditation on the 6-day creation from **Gen 1**.
      - d) **Psalm 113** is strikingly similar to Hannah's prayer from **1 Sam 2**.
      - e) **Psalm 118** has numerous parallels to the Song of Moses in **Ex 15**.

#### 4. Psalms as Used in the New Testament

- a. Psalms is the most quoted book of the Old Testament in the New Testament, and the book most frequently quoted by Jesus (over 93 New Testament citations in all).
  - 1) Of these citations, the most quoted Psalm is **Psalm 110**.
- b. Some of the most foundational teaching in the New Testament (the kingship of Jesus, the resurrection of Jesus, justification by faith, etc.) are supported and reinforced by the Psalms. The better we understand the Psalms, the better we will understand the whole of Scripture.
- c. We will discuss some more specific uses of the Psalms in the New Testament later in this outline.

### B. Personal Devotion

#### 1. Familiar and Foreign

- a. The Psalms are one of the most beloved sections of Scripture to disciples through the ages. One major reason is their appeal to the emotional range of the human experience. They feel familiar because we have lived them ourselves. They give a voice to both our pain and our joy.
  - 1) It is especially important that the Psalms contain such deep laments coupled, in nearly every instance, with praise. It is in these laments that we

learn that we are not alone in this fallen, broken world. Here are the bitter cries of betrayal, sickness, and death. These authors are no strangers to suffering. And yet they have found a way not only to tolerate God, but to still celebrate Him, to still trust Him. We find in these strains the echo of our own grief, and an invitation to greater trust in the God who hears our cries and brings comfort in our anguish.

- b. While the Psalms often feel familiar, they also strike us as foreign—strange language, offensive (to us) outbursts of anger, unfamiliar historical and geographical references.
  - 1) It is important to note that there are at least 3 major ways the Psalms are foreign to us: historically, culturally, and theologically. (Longman, *How to Read*, 13-14)
    - a) Historically - The Psalms were written between approximately 2,500 and 3,400 years ago. Much has changed in that time.
    - b) Culturally - The Psalms were primarily written by and for Near Eastern Jewish people. It should not surprise us if we counter unfamiliar expressions and ways of thinking.
    - c) Theologically - The Psalms were written almost entirely (as far as we can tell) under the Mosaic covenant, to a people who longed for the Messiah but were not privileged to see His day. We learn much about Jesus the Messiah from the Psalms as viewed from this side of the cross, but we will do well to remember they did not have this advantage (**1 Peter 1:10-12**).

## 2. Designed for Personal Application

- a. While the titles of the Psalms often give us insight to the author and the historical context of the Psalm, it is noteworthy that the text of each psalm is sufficiently vague that it might apply to any number of people or circumstances.
  - 1) For example, **Psalm 18** is clearly written about David being delivered from Saul (see the title and **2 Sam 22:1**), yet the text of Psalm 18 has surprisingly little detail about David's specific situation, never even mentioning Saul by name.
  - 2) This is a feature of the Psalms—they are intentionally ambiguous for personal application. As such, we can read them and mentally insert ourselves into the place of the psalmist, our problems in the place of their enemies, and use their words in our own prayers to the God we share.

## 3. Public and Private Worship

- a. It is noteworthy to distinguish between Psalms that used the voice of an individual and Psalms that use the voice of the community—often signaled through singular vs. plural first person pronouns.
- b. Many of the Psalms are clearly intended for personal/private worship:
 

“when I remember you upon my bed,  
and meditate on you in the watches of the night...” (**Psalm 63:6**)

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- c. But we also encounter a number of national/communal Psalms:
    - “But you have rejected us and disgraced us  
and have not gone out with our armies...” (Psalm 44:9)
  - d. As such, the Psalms are useful both in public and private worship. We need to approach God in the community of His people and hear each other’s expressions of pain and praise. But we must not neglect our personal, private devotion to God, who alone can know the depths of our joy and grief.
4. Transparency about the Emotional Range of Spiritual Living
- a. The emotional range of the Psalms takes us from the highest highs to the lowest lows of a life lived for God. This is important for several reasons.
    - 1) We need to understand that a life lived for God will often be filled with sorrow and lamentation. Overall, there are more Psalms that include lament than Psalms that are purely filled with praise. It is easy for us to develop unrealistic expectations of what life in God will be like, but the Psalms give us a good grounding in what it looks like to faithfully serve God in every season of life.
    - 2) The Psalms also give us spiritual direction for every situation of life. They are not only for moments of jubilant exultation, but also moments of deep heartbreak. We need to seek God in both kinds of moments, and every moment in between.
    - 3) The Psalms help us to pray more openly and honestly to God, while remaining reverent. Often our prayers are informed more by the public prayers that we hear in our Christian assemblies, which are often (appropriately) vague and aimed at the whole group. But the Psalms help us dig deeper in our personal prayers to God, guiding us in how to express the less presentable struggles we have and honestly grapple with anger, fear, doubt, and grief.
    - 4) The Psalms touch every part of our created nature: “The Psalms inform our intellect, arouse our emotions, direct our wills and simulate our imaginations.” (Longman, *How to Read*, 13-14) There is no part of our being that cannot benefit from the guidance provided by this book from God.

**Body:** The Poetry, Content, and Structure of the Psalms

I. The Poetry of the Psalms

A. Devices of Hebrew Poetry

1. Identifying Poetry in Hebrew

- a. It can be a difficult question at times. “...because the poems are not set out as poetry in the traditional Hebrew text, there are sometimes serious questions as to where the line breaks should come and, especially in some of the Prophets, ambiguities about the boundaries between prose and poetic passages.” (Alter, *Poetry* 3)

- b. "Meter" (a set number of syllables per line) as we use it in English poetry, does not seem to exist in Hebrew poetry, though many attempts have been made to identify it.
- 1) Alter does make a case for each line of poetry having 2, 3 or 4 stressed Hebrew syllables. He quotes Hrushovski, who notes: "...each stress dominates a group of two, three, or four syllables; there are two, three, or four such groups in a verset; and two, three, or four parallel versets in a sentence." (Alter, *Poetry* 8) This does not fully adhere to our Western concept of poetic meter, but provides another possible way to identify Hebrew verse.
- c. The primary marker of Hebrew poetry is sustained semantic parallelism. A secondary marker is the use of imagery.

## 2. Parallelism

- a. In Hebrew parallelism, a thought is expressed by crafting 2, 3, or sometimes 4 lines of poetry in sequence that correspond to each other.

- 1) 2-line parallelism is most common:

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; (**Psalm 1:5**)

- 2) 3-line (triadic) construction is sometimes employed:

Blessed is the man  
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,  
nor stands in the way of sinners,  
nor sits in the seat of scoffers; (**Psalm 1:1**)

- 3) 4-line construction is more rare:

Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,  
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.  
Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;  
worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness. (**Psalm 29:1-2**)

- b. Synonymous parallelism

- 1) Synonymous parallelism is the hallmark of Hebrew poetry. A simple definition is to think of "rhyming thoughts" instead of rhyming sounds, though there is more nuance to the idea.
- 2) There has been much debate over the centuries as to the exact nature of Hebrew parallelism, with one of two extremes often taken in regard to the relationship of parallel lines "A" and "B."
  - a) "A = B" The first extreme often oversimplifies the text, assuming that the two parallel lines must have the *exact same* meaning, with the B line only serving as a thesaurus for A. If this is all we think of when we think of "rhyming thoughts," further consideration is needed.
  - b) "A ≠ B" The second extreme may start with the seemingly noble premise that, "Scripture would never waste words, so the second line must always mean something more and different than the first line."

This is partially true, but can lead to overcorrection when there is substantial overlap in meaning between two parallel lines.

- c) “A, what’s more B” is a balanced approach that helps us grasp the meaning of the two lines together, but with the second line usually moving the thought forward in some way.
1. “As we read the lines of Hebrew poetry carefully, we see that the second phrase is related in meaning to the first phrase. However—and this is important—it *always* carries forward the thought found in the first phrase in some way. ... It is a simple insight, but causes a radical shift in how one reads poetry.” (Longman, *How to Read*, 98)
  2. Longman’s view is supported by Alter, though softened: “...there is no absolute necessity to insist on a differentiation here: it is by no means expected or obligatory that every paired set of terms in parallel versets reflect development or intensification. Poets may sometimes choose to step up all the parallel terms in a line, but in the majority of instances it is rather one key set of matched terms that carries the burden of development.” (Alter, *Poetry* 11)
- 3) Synonymous parallelism can be identified when the two lines are developing the same idea, rather than contrasting ideas.

a) Consider **Psalm 2:1**:

Why do the *nations* rage  
and the *peoples* plot in vain?

1. “Nations” and “peoples” are parallel, without much development.
2. “Rage” and “plot” parallel, but note how an internal feeling (rage) is carried forward to the active planning (plot) of outward action.

b) Note again in **Psalm 2:3**:

“Let us *burst* their bonds apart  
and *cast away* their cords from us.”

1. “Bonds” and “cords” are parallel, without much development.
2. But “burst” is carried forward by “cast away,” picturing the sequential action of breaking fetters then throwing them away.

c. Antithetic parallelism

- 1) Antithetic parallelism, on the other hand, is the paralleling of contrasting ideas. This is most frequently employed in the Proverbs, but also in Psalms.

The **thoughts** of the *righteous* are just;  
the **counsels** of the *wicked* are deceitful. (**Prov 12:5**)

- a) Some components of the line are synonymous: “thoughts” and “counsels.”
- b) But the main point of the line is to contrast: “righteous” and “wicked,” “just” and “deceitful.”

- 2) Note: There are many other subsets of parallelism, but for the scope of this introduction we will consider these two simple types.

d. Ellipsis

- 1) A feature that can sometimes make Hebrew poetry sound odd is ellipsis—when a word or phrase (usually the verb) is omitted (elided) in the second line. Thus the word/phrase in the first line does “double duty” when carried into the next line:

Judah became his sanctuary,  
Israel his dominion. (**Psalm 114:2**)

- a) Here “became” is carried into the second line, though the words are not present a second time: “Israel (became) his dominion.”

- 2) Another example:

What ails you, O sea, that you flee?  
O Jordan, that you turn back?  
O mountains, that you skip like rams?  
O hills, like lambs? (**Psalm 114:5-6**)

- a) “What ails you” is carried forward into the following 3 lines, though it is elided: “What ails you, O Jordan... O mountains...”  
b) The final line elides “that you skip” from line 3: “O hills, (that you skip) like lambs?”

- 3) This can sound odd in English, but it speaks to the compact nature of Hebrew poetry—an economy of words that makes the poetry distinct and powerful.

3. Imagery

a. Simile & Metaphor

- 1) We are much more familiar with these, as they are common features of English poetry as well.  
2) A simile makes a comparison using a conjunction (“like” or “as”), while a metaphor makes a comparison without a conjunction.

He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf,  
and Sirion like a young wild ox. (**Psalm 29:6**) (simile)

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. (**Psalm 23:1**) (metaphor)

- 3) Sometimes a simile or metaphor can serve as the connecting device between two lines of Hebrew poetry:

As a deer pants for flowing streams,  
so pants my soul for you, O God. (**Psalm 42:1**)

b. Personification

- 1) Another familiar poetic device is personification, where human attributes are given to something or someone non-human.

Let the rivers clap their hands;  
let the hills sing for joy together (**Psalm 98:8**)

- 2) Personification can be used for inanimate things (hills, rocks, rivers, etc.), but it can also be used for God Himself. God is spirit, yet He is often spoken of as having eyes, hands, a face, etc.

You have said, "Seek my face."  
My heart says to you,  
"Your face, LORD, do I seek." (**Psalm 27:8**)

c. Hyperbole

- 1) Hyperbole is intentional exaggeration for effect. This should be familiar to us, but sometimes an over-literal approach is taken with Scripture.

I am weary with my moaning;  
every night I flood my bed with tears;  
I drench my couch with my weeping. (**Psalm 6:6**)

- a) The Psalmist describes tears in term of a flood. It is not literally a flood, but he has been weeping profusely, so he exaggerates for effect.
- 2) Misunderstanding Hebrew poetry can have theological consequences, as in the oft-quoted **Psalm 51:5** when discussing the question of original sin:

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
and in sin did my mother conceive me. (**Psalm 51:5**)

- a) Note the hyperbole in the preceding verse as well:

Against you, you only, have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight, (**Psalm 51:4a**)

1. David had not sinned *only* against the Lord, but against Uriah, Bathsheba, and others. This is not literally true. His exaggeration is to show that his focus in this Psalm is his sin against God.
- b) **Psalm 51:5** is an exaggeration to emphasize how sinful David feels. Note also the hyperbole of trust in another psalm by David:

Yet you are he who took me from the womb;  
you made me trust you at my mother's breasts. (**Psalm 22:9**)

1. Infants are capable neither of sin against God nor trust in Him. David uses hyperbole in both **Psalm 51:5** and **Psalm 22:9** to make contrasting points of sinfulness and trust at different moments in his life.

4. Structure

a. Inclusio

- 1) An inclusio is formed when a section opens and closes with the same words:

O LORD, our Lord,

how majestic is your name in all the earth! (**Psalm 8:1 and 8:9**)

Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;  
for his steadfast love endures forever! (**Psalm 118:1 and 118:29**)

- 2) An inclusio serves both to set the section apart and set the tone or theme for that section.
  - 3) Several Psalms use “Hallelujah” (Praise YAH - short for Yahweh) as an inclusio: **Psalms 106, 113, 135, 146-150**
    - a) Several more Psalms use “Hallelujah” as either the opening or closing expression of the Psalm: **104, 105, 111, 112, 115, 116, 117**
- b. Chiasm or Symmetry
- 1) A chiasm is a restatement of two or more elements in reverse order, creating symmetry.
    - a) A word of caution: As with many poetic devices, it is possible to impose structure on the text that is not there. Beware of the forced application of chiasms and other devices.
  - 2) This can be used semantically within a verse:
 

for (A) the LORD knows (B) the way of the righteous,  
but (B) the way of the wicked (A) will perish. (**Psalm 1:6**)
  - 3) Or in the larger organization of a psalm:
    - a) **Psalm 2:**
      - A) **v1-3** - The scene on earth
      - B) **v4-6** - The scene in heaven
      - B) **v7-9** - The scene in heaven
      - A) **v1-3** - The scene on earth
  - 4) There are many proposed organizations of series of Psalms into symmetrical structures, but we will leave those for another study.
- c. Acrostic Psalms
- 1) Acrostic Psalms begin each successive line (or lines) with subsequent letters of the Hebrew alphabet, which contains 22 letters. This was likely originally a memorization tool, as most people did not have their own copy of the Scriptures.
  - 2) Acrostic Psalms include: **Psalms 9-10** (which together form one acrostic poem), **25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119** (a massive acrostic poem with 8 lines for each Hebrew letter), **145**
    - a) **Psalms 33 and 38** are noted as “quasi-acrostic,” since they contain 22 verses, but do not follow the alphabetic order. They are both situated next to fully acrostic psalms (34 and 37).
  - 3) Other acrostic passages in the Old Testament:
    - a) **Prov 31:10-31** - The poem depicting the worthy woman
    - b) **Lamentations 1-4** - Each of the first 4 chapters of Lamentations is its own acrostic poem. In chapters 1 and 2, every third line begins with a

successive letter. In chapter 3, each letter begins three successive lines. In chapter 4, every other line begins with a successive letter. Chapter 5 is not an acrostic, however it does contain 22 lines which correspond in number to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

- c) **Nahum 1:2-8** form a half-acrostic, using only half of the letters in the Hebrew alphabet, and the sequence is not rigid.

## II. The Content of the Psalms

### A. Title of the Book

1. Our word Psalm comes from the Greek title for the book *psalmos*, which translates the Hebrew *mizmor*, “song.” (ESV Study Bible, Psalms introduction)
2. The Hebrew title of the book is *Tehillim*, “Praises.” (ESV Study Bible, Psalms introduction)
  - a. Though the laments outnumber the praise psalms, the key theme of the book and the flow of the book leads us from a place of lament to a place of praise.

### B. Questions Concerning Titles and Authorship

1. 116 of the Psalms have some kind of title or superscription. (Longman, *Commentary* 24)
  - a. The originality of the titles (or superscriptions) is frequently called into question.
    - 1) It is possible that the titles were added at some point after the completion of each Psalm. We see this kind of editorial process, for instance, with the addition of the death of Moses to the book of Deuteronomy (**Deut 34**). It is possible that the titles were added by the author at the time of writing, or at a later time by an editor giving accurate information about the original authorship and use of the Psalm. The question at hand is whether or not the titles were *accurately* connected to their respective Psalms, or rather were added at the whim of an editor providing dubious connections and attributing Psalms to authors who did not originally write them.
    - 2) The titles seem to be as old as the texts of the Psalms themselves.
      - a) The Hebrew text includes the title in the numbering as the first verse of the Psalm, linking it tightly to the text. The fact that English translations begin the numbering with the text of the Psalm is not a slight against the authenticity of the title.
      - b) One notable example is the presence of the title of **Psalm 18** when the Psalm is reproduced almost entirely in **2 Sam 22**. This gives evidence that the titles were attached to the Psalms very early in their existence.
2. The authorship of the Psalms has also been hotly contested, especially in recent scholarship.
  - a. The question centers around two things: 1) the usage of the Hebrew prefix “l<sup>e</sup>” (using the Hebrew letter *lamed*) in relation to the name appearing in the title, and 2) the congruency between the author in the title and the content of the Psalm.
    - 1) “...the Hebrew preposition *lamed* can be taken in a number of different ways. Using *ledavid* as our example, this theoretically could be rendered:  
  
Of David or By David (indicating authorship)  
Concerning David

In the Tradition of David  
 For David('s use)  
 Dedicated to David" (Longman, *Commentary* 41)

- a) While it is true that *lamed* can have a broad semantic range, it seems clear from the presentation of the Psalms, especially those with historical titles, that the basic use of *lamed* in the titles is to indicate authorship. It seems most natural to take "Of David" (or another author) as indicating authorship, unless there is a very good reason from the text to take *lamed* in another sense (see discussion at the end of section C below on Heman and Ethan in **Psalms 88** and **89**).
- 2) Many commentators claim to see contradictions or at least tenuous connections between the title and the text of various Psalms. These criticisms themselves are quite tenuous, and several of them will be answered more specifically below in letter C on "Authorship / Names in Titles" and letter D on "Historical Titles."
  - a) One broad objection is the anachronistic mentioning of the temple in several Psalms of David (**Psalm 5:7; 11:4; 18:6; 27:4; 29:9; 30** (title); **65:4; 68:29; 138:2**). This objection is fairly easily answered in that David knew he was making preparations for the temple, and prepared Psalms for future use with this in mind (**1 Chr 16** records a composite Psalm arranged by David for the bringing of the ark to Jerusalem—this kind of preparation could have easily been made for the future worship at the temple). Another possible answer is that some of these Psalms were updated for use at the temple after the death of David (we see similar anachronistic updates in **1 Sam 1:9; 3:3**, with references to the temple well before its construction).
  - b) To summarize what will be discussed below, while there are at times wrinkles in the natural reading of an author/historical setting in relation to the text of a given Psalm, there are frequently explanations that would smooth the alleged contradictions.
3. The strongest case for both the authenticity of the titles and authorship comes from the way the Psalms are quoted and used in the New Testament.
  - a. The following Psalms are attributed to David in the New Testament:
    - 1) **Psalm 2** in **Acts 4:25-26**.
      - a) **Psalm 2** is anonymous in the Psalter, but attributed to David here, which fits perfectly given the allusions to the Promises to David from **2 Sam 7** in **Psalm 2**.
    - 2) **Psalm 16** in **Acts 2:24-32**.
      - a) Peter builds his case to the Jews on the Davidic authorship of **Psalm 16**. He states that David was conscious that he was not writing about himself, but about the Messiah to come. The entire argument falls apart if "of David" does not indicate his authorship in **Psalm 16**.
    - 3) **Psalm 32** in **Rom 4:5-8**.
      - a) Here Paul builds his argument first on Abraham and then on the authorship of David in **Psalm 32**. The inspired apostle uses the Davidic

authorship as the thrust of his argument about forgiveness on the basis of faith.

4) **Psalm 69** in **Acts 1:16-20** and **Rom 11:9-10**.

- a) Peter and later Paul cite David's authorship of **Psalm 69**, which is used in several other places in the New Testament, but attributed to David in the passages above.
- b) This is another example of imprecatory language from Psalms quoted as inspired Scripture.

5) **Psalm 95** in **Heb 4:7**.

- a) The author of Hebrews makes a chronological point about David's authorship of **Psalm 95** (anonymous in the Psalter) coming well after Joshua's conquest. The argument hinges on the Psalm coming from David and his timeframe.

6) **Psalm 109** in **Acts 1:16-20**.

- a) Peter connects the judgment and replacement of Judas to two Psalms of David: **Psalm 69** (see above) and **Psalm 109**.

7) **Psalm 110** in **Mt 22:41-46; Mk 12:36; Lk 20:42-43** and **Acts 2:34-36**.

- a) Jesus Himself builds His famous question about the Son/Lord of David on the Davidic authorship of **Psalm 110**. It makes a mockery of Jesus' argument to claim this was a Psalm not originally written by David in the first person, but instead later attributed to David by an editor.
- b) Peter builds to the climactic end of his sermon in **Acts 2** showing that David was not speaking of himself in **Psalm 110**, but rather of the Messiah, his Lord. When Peter concludes with "God has made Him both Lord and Christ..." he is drawing specifically from the opening of **Psalm 110**: "The Lord said to My Lord."

C. Authorship / Names in Titles

1. "Of David" - 73 Psalms (75 including **Psalm 2** and **95**)

a. These come in 4 major collections:

1) **Psalm 3-41** (almost the entirety of Book 1)

- a) Except **Psalm 10** (which may originally be part of **Psalm 9**, which is attributed to David) and **Psalm 33**

2) **Psalm 51-71** (almost 2/3 of Book 2)

- a) Except for **Psalms 66, 67, and 71**.
- b) This collection contains the bulk of the historical titles, which will be discussed in more detail in section D below.

3) **Psalm 108-110**

4) **Psalm 138-145**

- b. There are only 3 David Psalms in Books 3 and 4: **Psalms 86, 101, and 103** (4 if you count **Psalm 95**, see below).

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- c. **Psalms 18** and **36** add to David, "...the servant of the LORD."
  - d. Two more Psalms (which have no title in Psalms) are credited to David in the New Testament:
    - 1) **Psalm 2** is credited to David in **Acts 4:25**.
    - 2) **Psalm 95** is credited to David in **Hebrews 4:7**.
  - e. Davidic authorship for half of the book of Psalms fits well with the portrait of David in the historical books as a musician (**1 Sam 16:15-23**; **2 Sam 1:17-27**; **2 Sam 22 = Psalm 18**; **2 Sam 23:1-7**; **1 Chr 6:31**; **15:16**; **16:7-36**; **25:1**; **2 Chr 29:30**; **Ezra 3:10**; **Neh 12:24**; **Amos 6:5**) (Longman, Commentary 26)
2. "Of the Sons of Korah" - 11 Psalms (possibly 12 including **Psalm 88**)
- a. The Korahites have special collection at the beginning of Book 2: **Psalms 42-49**.
    - 1) Except **Psalm 43**, which has no title, but may have originally been one Psalm with **Psalm 42**, since they share a common refrain (**Ps 42:5,11**; **43:5**).
  - b. They are also connected to **Psalms 84, 85, 87**, and in part **88**, which is also shares a reference to Heman (see section below o Heman).
  - c. These are if fact the descendants of the rebellious Korah mentioned in **Num 16**.
    - 1) In **Num 26:11** we learn that (at least some of) the sons of Korah did not die along with Korah himself.
    - 2) The genealogies from **Num 16:1** and **1 Chr 6:33-38** line up, confirming that Heman, one of the temple musicians, was indeed one of the descendants of the rebellious Korah. This genealogy includes the prophet Samuel in the line of Korah as well.
  - d. Thus the title "Sons of Korah" could refer to people from a large family over a long period of time, as the Sons of Korah (or Korahites) are mentioned in the days of Hezekiah in **2 Chr 10:29**, and much later in Israel's history in **1 Chr 9:19,31**. (Longman, Commentary 28)
3. "Of Asaph" - 12 Psalms
- a. Asaph has a special collection that begins Book 3: **Psalms 73-83**
  - b. **Psalm 50**, the only Asaph Psalm outside his collection.
  - c. Asaph was a temple musician at the time of David, mentioned in **1 Chr 15-16**; **25**; **2 Chr 5:12**. His sons went on to serve the Lord musically as well (**2 Chr 20:14**; **35:15**).
4. "Of Solomon" - 2 Psalms (possibly 1 excluding Psalm 72)
- a. **Psalm 72** - The title is rendered "Of Solomon" and sometimes "For Solomon" by translators that see the Psalm as better fitting a blessing written (perhaps by David) on Solomon's behalf, perhaps on the day of his inauguration as king.
  - b. **Psalm 127** is one of the Psalms of Ascent and it attributed to Solomon.
  - c. Solomon was renowned for his proverbs, but also for his songs: "He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005." (**1 Kgs 4:32**)
5. "Of Moses" - 1 Psalm
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- a. **Psalm 90** is attributed to Moses, and it fits with the picture of Moses watching a rebellious generation pass away under the Lord's curse in the wilderness.
  - b. Mosaic authorship would make this very likely the oldest Psalm in the book, dating to c.1400 BC.
6. "Of Heman the Ezrahite" - 1 Psalm (also attributed to the Sons of Korah)
- a. **Psalm 88** is the only psalm associated with Heman the Ezrahite.
  - b. The exact identity of Heman is Ezrahite is hard to determine. There are three main possibilities for the authorship of **Psalm 88**.
    - 1) There is a Heman mentioned beginning in **1 Chr 15:17** that was a leader in the temple worship at the time of David.
      - a) According to the genealogy in **1 Chr 6:31-48**, he was a descendant of Levi, Kohath, Korah (of Korah's rebellion - see **Num 16:1; 26:11**), and the grandson of Samuel (see **1 Sam 1:1; 8:2**)
        - 1. This fits well as Heman would himself be one of the Sons of Korah, and **Psalm 88** is dually attributed to the Sons of Korah.
      - 2) There is another Heman during the time Israel's stay in Egypt, a wisdom figure, one of the grandsons of Judah, mentioned in **1 Chr 2:6**, and **1 Kgs 4:31**.
        - a) He also had a brother Ethan, called "Ethan the Ezrahite" in **1 Kgs 4:31**. Perhaps this Heman better fits the title "Heman the Ezrahite," but this would date the psalm far earlier, well before Moses.
      - 3) The third possibility is that the *lamed* prefix here ("of") is used to say "in the manner of" Heman the Ezrahite, or "dedicated to," and neither of these Hemans are to be viewed as the author of the Psalm. Its authorship may be linked rather to the Sons of Korah, or it may be an anonymous Psalm used by the Sons of Korah in worship and dedicated to Heman the grandson of Judah.
    - c. The text of **Psalm 88** itself does not eliminate or promote any of these possibilities.
    - d. Perhaps the most likely option is the second Ethan, as he is linked with the Sons of Korah, and is also living at the same time as David and Asaph, who wrote many of the other Psalms. This becomes further complicated when we consider the identity of the figure connected with the next Psalm, Ethan the Ezrahite.
7. "Of Ethan the Ezrahite" - 1 Psalm
- a. **Psalm 89** is the only Psalm associated with Ethan the Ezrahite.
  - b. The exact identity of Ethan the Ezrahite is also hard to determine for many of the same reasons mentioned with Heman. Again, there are 3 main possibilities:
    - 1) There is an Ethan mentioned beginning in **1 Chr 15:17** who was also a leader in the temple worship during the time of David.
      - a) This Ethan was a descendant of Levi through Merari (**1 Chr 6:31-48**), but not one of the descendants of Korah.
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- b) It appears that this Ethan's name was changed to Jeduthun sometime after his entry into the temple service (see notes on Jeduthun's name in the Psalms below).
1. The "Big Three" of the temple worship were Heman, Asaph, and Ethan. Ethan is mentioned alongside Asaph and Heman at the beginning of his service in **1 Chr 15:17,19**.
  2. Later in Chronicles, the "Big Three" seems to switch to Asaph, Heman, and *Jeduthun*. They are mentioned together in **1 Chr 25:1,6; 2 Chr 5:12**. They are later mentioned together in the days of Josiah alongside David in **2 Chr 35:15**, where Jeduthun is also mentioned as being a "seer." It seems likely that Jeduthun is a different name for the Ethan mentioned earlier in Chronicles.
- 2) There is another Ethan, called "Ethan the Ezrahite," during the time of Israel's stay in Egypt, a wisdom figure, one of the grandsons of Judah, mentioned in **1 Chr 2:6**, and **1 Kgs 4:31**.
- a) This name is the only exact match for "Ethan the Ezrahite" in Scripture. He also had a brother named Heman. The full set of grandsons of Judah, Zimri, Ethan, Heman, Calcol, and Dara, are mentioned together in **1 Chr 2:6** and all but Zimri are mentioned again in **1 Kgs 4:31**. This would again date the psalm far earlier, well before Moses.
- 3) The third possibility is that the *le / lamed* prefix here ("of") is used to say "in the manner of" Ethan the Ezrahite, or "dedicated to," and neither of these Ethans are to be viewed as the author of the Psalm.
- a) If this is the case, the unknown author of the psalm may have been linking **Psalm 89** to the Ethan the wisdom figure and grandson of Judah (option 2). This could play into the royal promises to Judah in **Gen 49:10**: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah," which is pertinent to the content of **Psalm 89**.
- c. The text of **Psalm 89** gives us much more information than **Psalm 88**, which may point to a possible date of writing.
- 1) **Psalm 89** is a celebration and lament concerning the promises given to David in **2 Sam 7**. This would almost certainly date the Psalm during or after the time of David, eliminating the possibility of Ethan the Ezrahite, grandson of Judah, #2 mentioned above.
  - 2) The text of **Psalm 89** seems to be set in a time of devastating military defeat, when it appeared that God's promises to David had failed (**Ps 89:38-51**). This would fit best as a lament during or after the exile to Babylon, when the Davidic line was completely cut off. It is possible that the Ethan the temple musician could have composed this Psalm during a lesser military defeat of David's time or shortly afterward (poetry can exaggerate a situation), but a captivity timeframe would eliminate both of these Ethans and point toward an authorship situation more like #3 mentioned above.
- d. Perhaps the most likely situation for **Psalm 89** is an anonymous author writing "in the manner of" or "dedicated to" Ethan the Ezrahite. It is difficult to say for certain. But regardless of original authorship, the Psalm plays an important role in the theme of exile within the Psalter, as we will see later.

## 8. “(According) To Jeduthun”

- a. Jeduthun’s name appears in the titles of **Psalm 39, 62, 77**.
- b. It seems unlikely that Jeduthun is the author in these psalms, as each Psalm also includes another’s name:
  - 1) **Psalm 39**: “To the choirmaster: to Jeduthun. A Psalm of David.”
    - a) This could be rendered “to” or “of” Jeduthun, possibly implying authorship. However, “A Psalm” and “of David” together usually implies authorship. **Psalm 39** is also in the midst of a David collection.
    - b) The coupling of “To the choirmaster’ and “to Jeduthun” may identify Jeduthun as the choirmaster in charge of using/directing this Psalm in the corporate worship (the same applies to **Psalms 62** and **77** below).
  - 2) **Psalm 62**: “To the choirmaster: according to Jeduthun. A Psalm of David.”
    - a) Again, it would appear that David is the author here. **Psalm 62** is in the midst of the second David collection.
    - b) The Hebrew preposition attached to Jeduthun is also different here, rendered “according to.”
  - 3) **Psalm 77**: “To the choirmaster: according to Jeduthun. A Psalm of Asaph.”
    - a) This is almost identical to the title of **Psalm 62**, except the implied author is Asaph. **Psalm 77** is in the midst of the Asaph collection.
    - b) The Hebrew preposition attached to Jeduthun is also different here, rendered “according to.”

## D. Historical Titles

1. There are 13 Psalms linked to historical events, all of them tied to the life of David.
  - a. Some criticism has been given to David’s ability to craft such eloquent poetry in some of these circumstances (namely **Psalm 34**’s acrostic poem of thanksgiving). However, first, we must not underestimate David’s ability—hard circumstances have produced many great works of music. And second, nothing about the title of these Psalms requires its full writing *during* the events described, but they could easily be inspired by reflections during those events, then completed at a later time.
2. **Psalm 3** - “when he fled from Absalom his son”
  - a. See **2 Sam 15:13-31**.
3. **Psalm 7** - “concerning the words of Cush, a Benjaminite.”
  - a. Nothing is known of a Benjaminite named Cush elsewhere in Scripture. But David did have other notable Benjaminite enemies: Shimei (**2 Sam 16:5-14**), Sheba (**2 Sam 20:1-22**), and of course, Saul (**1 Sam 18ff**).
  - b. The fact that this Psalm is tied to a person not named elsewhere in Scripture strengthens the case for its authenticity. If the titles were (as some suggest) being added by editors centuries later, why link this Psalm to an event not recorded in the Biblical text?

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4. **Psalm 18** - “who addressed the words of this song to the LORD on the day when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. He said:”
- This title is duplicated, along with nearly the entirety of Psalm 18, in **2 Sam 22**.
  - The duplication of the title in **2 Sam 22:1** is strong evidence for the authenticity of the titles in Psalms, as well as the authenticity of Davidic authorship.
5. **Psalm 34** - “when he changed his behavior before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away.”
- See **1 Sam 21:10–22:1**. It may be noted that Abimelech (which means “my father is king”), is possibly a title. The Philistine ruler was named Achish, but it would not be uncommon for multiple rulers to share the same title.
  - This is the same general setting as **Psalm 56**.
6. **Psalm 51** - “when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.”
- See **2 Sam 11-12**. The content of the psalm matches the occasion particularly strongly in this instance.
7. **Psalm 52** - “when Doeg, the Edomite, came and told Saul, “David has come to the house of Ahimelech.”
- See **1 Sam 22:6-23**.
  - Some see the connection to Doeg’s treachery as tenuous, as Doeg did great damage with his words, but it was not recorded that he actually lied against David (as the Psalm says in **vs.2,4**). (Alter 184) This criticism, however, is itself tenuous, as the Psalm may give more detail than the historical account (the historical books are far from exhaustive).
8. **Psalm 54** - “when the Ziphites went and told Saul, “Is not David hiding among us?”
- See **1 Sam 23:29** and **26:1**.
  - Some raise an objection to Davidic authorship in this Psalm: “Again, the general plea for God’s help, conventional in a supplication psalm, has been editorially linked with a particular incident in the life of David that it fits only in part. The complaint “strangers have risen against me” could scarcely refer to Saul, who is hostile to David but by no means a stranger to him or a foreigner (*zar*) in relation to him.” (Alter 189)
    - One possible answer lies in a textual variant that could read “proud ones” instead of “foreigners.” The NET notes: “Many medieval Hebrew mss read זְדִים (*zedim*, “proud ones”) rather than זָרִים (*zarim*, “foreigners”). (No matter which reading one chooses as original, dalet-resch confusion accounts for the existence of the variant.) The term זְדִים (“proud ones”) occurs in parallelism with עֲרִיצִים (*aritsim*, “violent ones”) in Ps 86:14 and Isa 13:11. However, זָרִים (*zarim*, “foreigners”) is parallel to עֲרִיצִים (*aritsim*, “violent ones”) in Isa 25:5; 29:5; Ezek 28:7; 31:12.” (NET footnote)
    - Even if “foreigners” is the correct reading, it may be that David is referring to his kinsmen (the Ziphites belong to Judah) as foreigners, since they are acting like Gentile enemies in their violent pursuit of his life.
9. **Psalm 56** - “when the Philistines seized him in Gath.”

- a. See **1 Sam 21:10–22:1**.
  - b. This is the same general setting as **Psalm 34**.
10. **Psalm 57** - “when he fled from Saul, in the cave.”
- a. See **1 Sam 22:1** or possibly **24:1-3**.
  - b. This may be the same setting as **Psalm 63** and/or **142**.
11. **Psalm 59** - “when Saul sent men to watch his house in order to kill him.”
- a. See **1 Sam 19:11-17**.
  - b. Some find Davidic authorship dubious due to David’s reference to “all the nations” in **v6**, saying that this could scarcely refer to Saul and his men. (Alter 205)
    - 1) This criticism is weak, as David could easily be acknowledging the Lord’s kingship over all nations, of which Saul and his men are but a part. He recognizes that the Lord’s ability to deliver him from Saul shows the Lord’s ability to bring judgment on any nation (similar to his reasoning which connected deliverance from the lion and the bear to deliverance from Goliath in **1 Sam 17:36**).
12. **Psalm 60** - “when he strove with Aram-naharaim and with Aram-zobah, and when Joab on his return struck down twelve thousand of Edom in the Valley of Salt.”
- a. See **2 Sam 8:13-14**. (Also **2 Sam 8:3; 10:16; 1 Chr 18:3,12**)
    - 1) There is a numerical difference in the casualties reported—12,000 here vs. 18,000 in **2 Sam 8:13** and **1 Chr 18:12**. There could have been different ways of counting the casualties. Or this could have been an earlier report, as the lamenting nature of the Psalm seems to indicate it was composed before the campaign was completed. (ESV Study Bible footnote)
13. **Psalm 63** - “when he was in the wilderness of Judah.”
- a. Possibly when he was fleeing from Saul—see **1 Sam 23:14** or **24:1**.
  - b. Or possibly when he was fleeing from Absalom—see **2 Sam 16:14; 17:2,29**.
  - c. The language of this Psalm fits particularly well with the arid climate of the Judean wilderness.
  - d. This may be the same setting as **Psalm 57** and/or **142**
14. **Psalm 142** - “when he was in the cave.”
- a. See **1 Sam 22:1** or possibly **24:1-3**.
  - b. This may be the same setting as **Psalm 57** and/or **63**.

#### E. Date(s) of Writing

1. The Psalms seem to span approximately 900 years (c.1400–500 BC)
  - a. The oldest Psalm is likely **Psalm 90**, a prayer of Moses. likely dating to around 1400 BC.
  - b. The majority of the Psalms seem to be associated with the time of David, Asaph, and Solomon (87 Psalms together), around 1000 BC.

c. The latest Psalms are associated with the Babylonian exile and return (c. 500 BC), most notably **Psalm 137**, a lament over the exile.

- 1) Other Psalms that mention the exile are **Psalms 106:47; 107:2-3; 126**.
- 2) Other Psalms that would fit thematically with the exile (even if written during other periods) includes **Psalms 74, 79, 80, 89** (more discussion on this in section III, the Structure of the Psalter)

#### F. Terminology used in Titles and Text

1. *Selah*: Unknown meaning. Possibly: Pause, Crescendo, or Musical Interlude, some sort of musical indicator.
  - a. Appears only in Psalms (71x) and **Hab 3:3,9,13**
2. *Higgaion*: Unknown Meaning. Possibly a musical or liturgical term.
  - a. Appears only in **Psalm 9:16** alongside *Selah*
3. *Maskil*: Unknown meaning. Derived from a verb meaning “to be prudent, to be wise” (NET footnote Ps 32:1). Possibly: Contemplative, Didactic (moral teaching), or Skillful (Well written) Psalm
  - a. Appears in titles of **Psalms 32, 42, 44, 45, 52-55, 74, 78, 88, 89, 142** and **Ps 47:7**
4. *Miktam*: Unknown meaning. Possibly: Epigrammatic (pithy, witty) Poem, or Atonement Psalm
  - a. Appears in titles of **Psalms 16, 57-60**
5. *Shiggaion*: Unknown meaning. Possibly Rambling Poem.
  - a. Appears in **Psalm 7** and **Hab 3:1** (related word)
6. *Sheol*: (Sometimes translated “hades” or “hell” in KJV) - The realm of all the dead, both righteous and wicked; the grave; sometimes pictured as the lowest possible place.
  - a. Appears 65x in OT, 15x in Psalms
7. *Abaddon*: Place of destruction or ruin; or Destroyer. The noun is derived from a verbal root meaning “to perish,” “to die.” (NET footnote Ps 88:11)
  - a. Appears in **Psalm 88:11; Job 26:6; 28:22; 31:12; Prov 15:11; 27:20; Rev 9:11**
8. “For instruction/to teach”
  - a. Appears in **Psalm 60**
9. “A testimony”
  - a. Appears in **Psalm 80**
10. “To the choirmaster” (or music director, or lead player)
  - a. Appears 55x in Psalms and **Hab 3:19**
  - b. “(According) To Jeduthun” appears in **Psalm 39, 62, 77**, possibly identifying Jeduthun as the choirmaster at the time.
    - 1) Jeduthun is apparently the name given to Ethan after his entry into the temple service (see **1 Chr 16:37,41**) (see notes above on Ethan/Jeduthun).
11. Accompaniment notes:

- 
- a. “With stringed instruments” appears in **Psalms 4, 6, 54, 55, 61, 67, 76**
  - b. “For the flutes (also the name of a melody?)” appears in **Psalm 5**
12. According to...
- a. “According to The Sheminith (8-stringed lyre?)” appears in **Psalms 6, 12** and **1 Chron 15:21**
  - b. “According to The Gittith (Instrument? From Gath?)” appears in **Psalms 8, 81, 84**
  - c. “According to Muth-labben (To Die for the Son?)” appears in **Psalm 9**
  - d. “According to Aijeleth Hashshahar (The Doe of the Dawn)” appears in **Psalm 22**
  - e. “According to Shoshannim (Lilies)” appears in **Psalms 45, 69, 80**
  - f. “According to Shushan (Lily) Eduth (testimony)” appears in **Psalm 60**
    - 1) “Testimony” also appears in the title of **Psalm 80**
  - g. “According to Alamoith (Girls/Sopranos?)” appears in **Psalm 46** and **1 Chron 15:20**
  - h. “According to Mahalath (sickness?)” appears in **Psalm 53**
  - i. “According to Mahalath (sickness?) Leannoth (affliction?)” appears in **Psalm 88**
  - j. “According to Jonath Elem Rehokim (The Dove on Far-Off Terebinths)” appears in **Psalm 56**
  - k. “According to Al-Tashheth (Do Not Destroy)” appears in **Psalms 57-59, 75**
13. “A Psalm, “A Song, “A Prayer,” etc.
- a. “A Psalm” appears in the title of 57 Psalms (often followed by an author, sometimes standing alone)
  - b. “A song” appears in the titles of **Psalms 46, 48, 65-68, 75, 76, 83, 87, 108**
    - 1) “A song” often appears alongside “A Psalm,” making them hard to distinguish. Some have speculated that “song” refers more to vocal music, while “psalm” refers more to musical accompaniment, but this is uncertain. (Bullock 27)
  - c. “A love song” appears in the title of **Psalm 45**
  - d. “(A song/psalm) of praise” appears in the title of **Psalm 145**
  - e. “...which he sang to the LORD” appears in **Psalm 7**
  - f. “A prayer” appears in the titles of **Psalms 17, 86, 90, 102, 142**
    - 1) **Psalm 102** extends to “A Prayer of one afflicted, when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the LORD.”
    - 2) “Prayer” also appears in the editorial conclusion of Book 2 - **Psalm 72:20** “The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended.”
14. Occasions
- a. “A song at the dedication of the temple” appears in **Psalm 30**
  - b. “For the memorial (offering)” appears in **Psalms 38, 70**
-

- c. “A song for the Sabbath” appears in **Psalm 92**
- d. “A Psalm for giving thanks” appears in **Psalm 100**
- e. “A song of ascents” appears in **Psalms 120-134**

#### G. Numbering of the Psalms

1. **Acts 13:33** confirms that from ancient times the Psalms were numbered, and that **Psalm 2** has long been in that position in the sequence of Psalms.
2. Potential splitting up of individual Psalms:
  - a. **Psalms 9 and 10**, which together form one complete acrostic poem, are presented as a single Psalm in the Septuagint. They were likely originally one Psalm.
  - b. Some medieval Hebrew mss combine **Psalms 42 and 43** into a single psalm, as they share a common refrain (**42:5,11; 43:5**). (NET footnote Ps 42 intro)
3. Different numbering in the Septuagint
  - a. Beginning with **Psalms 9-10** mentioned above, the Septuagint departs from the Hebrew numbering and division of the Psalms in a few places, listed below: (adapted from Bullock 42)
    - 1) Our Psalm 1-8 = LXX Psalm 1-8
    - 2) **Our Psalm 9 & 10 = LXX Psalm 9**
    - 3) Our Psalm 11-113 = LXX Psalm 10-112
    - 4) **Our Psalm 114 & 115 = LXX Psalm 113**
    - 5) **Our Psalm 116:1-9 = LXX Psalm 114**
    - 6) **Our Psalm 116:10-19 = LXX Psalm 115**
    - 7) Our Psalm 117-146 = LXX Psalm 116-145
    - 8) **Our Psalm 147:1-11 = LXX Psalm 146**
    - 9) **Our Psalm 147:12-20 = LXX Psalm 147**
    - 10) Our Psalm 148-150 = LXX Psalm 148-150
  - b. The Septuagint also includes an additional Psalm, either unnumbered, or numbered as Psalm 151 (sometimes included in the Apocrypha):
    - 1) The Greek version was the only known copy in existence until a Hebrew version (mostly complete) was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Hebrew version differs somewhat from the Greek, and it appears that the Greek is a hybrid of the Hebrew and Syriac versions. The NRSV text of the Greek version is below:
      - a) This psalm is ascribed to David as his own composition (though it is outside the number), after he had fought in single combat with Goliath.
        - <sup>1</sup>I was small among my brothers,  
and the youngest in my father’s house;  
I tended my father’s sheep.
        - <sup>2</sup>My hands made a harp;  
my fingers fashioned a lyre.

- <sup>3</sup> And who will tell my Lord?  
The Lord himself; it is he who hears.
- <sup>4</sup> It was he who sent his messenger  
and took me from my father's sheep,  
and anointed me with his anointing oil.
- <sup>5</sup> My brothers were handsome and tall,  
but the Lord was not pleased with them.
- <sup>6</sup> I went out to meet the Philistine,  
and he cursed me by his idols.
- <sup>7</sup> But I drew his own sword;  
I beheaded him, and took away disgrace  
from the people of Israel.

#### 4. Duplicate Material in the Psalms

##### a. **Psalm 14** and **Psalm 53**

1) **Psalm 14** is reproduced, almost exactly, in **Psalm 53**.

a) The titles are different:

1. **14**: "To the choirmaster. Of David."

2. **53**: "To the choirmaster: according to Mahalath. A Maskil of David."

b) The text of the Psalms is almost identical, except for **14:5-6** differing from **53:5** (except for the first line of each portion).

c) Another notable difference is the name used for God.

1. **Psalm 14** uses Yahweh 4 times.

2. **Psalm 53** substitutes Elohim for Yahweh.

a. This will resurface in a discussion of the difference in Books 1 & 2 of Psalms in Part III below.

##### b. **Psalm 108** is a composite Psalm.

1) The entire text of Psalm 108 is a reproduction of 2 previous Psalms in the collection, with only very minor variation.

a) **Psalm 108:1-5** is taken from **Psalm 57:7-11**.

b) **Psalm 108:6-13** is taken from **Psalm 60:5-12**.

2) Both are Psalms of David with historical titles, but it is simply called "A Song. A Psalm of David" in the title of **108**.

3) It is unclear as to why this particular Psalm has been stitched together. However, it is noteworthy that a similar example can be seen in the composite Psalm David arranged for the ark's arrival in Jerusalem in **1 Chr 16:7-36**.

a) **1 Chr 16:8-22** is taken from **Psalm 105:1-15**.

b) **1 Chr 16:23-33** is taken from **Psalm 96:1-13** (excluding v10).

c) **1 Chr 16:34** is a common refrain appearing numerous places in the Old Testament, including **Psalm 106:1**.

d) **1 Chr 16:35-36** is taken from **Psalm 106:47-48** (which includes the editorial conclusion of Book 4).

1. This section is introduced in **1 Chr 16:35** by “say also,” perhaps indicating that this final section was a later editorial addition by the Chronicler.
2. The final phrase of **Psalm 106:48** is “And let all the people say, “Amen!” / Praise the LORD!” and this is perfectly paralleled in action of the people in **1 Chr 16:36**: “Then all the people said, “Amen!” and praised the LORD.”

#### H. The Psalms: Hymnbook? Prayerbook? Both?

1. Fundamentally, all of the Psalms are Hebrew poems. Some were clearly to be sung, some were clearly prayers offered to God.
2. Sometimes the Psalms are referred to as the “hymnbook” of Israel. There is some truth to this, as there are musical references throughout the Psalms. However, some of the poems are also identified as prayers (**Psalm 90** for instance), and it is not certain that every Psalm was set to music. Certainly, song lyrics can be used in prayer, and the words of a prayer can be sung, so it is sometimes uncertain what range of use these poems enjoyed.
3. A majority of the Psalms (108) include prayer to God (speaking to God / addressing God in the second person). Many switch between addressing God in the second and third person. The following are 42 Psalms that do *not* address God in the second person: **1, 2, 11, 14, 24, 29, 34, 37, (45), 46, 47, 49, 50, 53, 78, 81, 87, 95, 96, 98, 100, 105, 107, (110), 112, 113, 114, 117, 121, 122, 124, 127, 128, 129, 133, 134, 136, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150.**
  - a. The Psalms in parenthesis above are Psalms that address the king, who is also identified as Jesus in the New Testament. It is not certain if the psalmist would have written these as a “prayer” in the same sense.
4. There are several Psalms where both song and prayer seem to be happening simultaneously: **Psalm 4** (title, v1); **18** (title); **42:8**; **88** (title, v2); **142** (title)

#### I. Genres

1. One way to organize the content of the Psalter is to sort the individual Psalms into categories or genres.
  - a. A word of caution: While studying genres of the Psalms is a popular approach to make the book more approachable, discretion is needed when trying to place each Psalm neatly in one genre. There are general features that many Psalms share that are helpful to notice. But many Psalms combine elements of several genres, and a few Psalms defy categorization almost completely. These are not meant to be iron-clad categories, and different people may place a Psalm in different genres based on their perspective.
  - b. On “Messianic” Psalms: Messianic Psalms are not included as a separate category below, as they are often oversimplified as “Psalms that are prophecies about Jesus.” The nature of Biblical prophecy is often complex, using multiple fulfillments and shadows to point to the Messianic future. There are many genres mentioned below that all foreshadow Christ and are quoted as being fulfilled in

Him. We should not limit Psalms that point to Jesus to a specific category, for ultimately all types of Psalms find their fulfillment in Him.

## 2. Major Genres of the Psalms:

### a. Praise

- 1) These Psalms often begin with a call or worship.

Shout for joy in the LORD, O you righteous!  
Praise befits the upright. (**Ps 33:1**)

- 2) There is almost always a *reason* given to motivate praise to God.

For the word of the LORD is upright,  
and all his work is done in faithfulness. (**Ps 33:4**)

### b. Lament

- 1) This is a broad category, and encompasses the largest number of Psalms.
- 2) These Psalms often begin with the presentation of a problem, or a petition to God to hear their cry.

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!  
O Lord, hear my voice!  
Let your ears be attentive  
to the voice of my pleas for mercy! (**Ps 130:1-2**)

- 3) The Psalmist will often continue with either a confession of sin or an assertion of innocence.

For your name's sake, O LORD,  
pardon my guilt, for it is great. (**Ps 26:11**)

Vindicate me, O LORD,  
for I have walked in my integrity,  
and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering. (**Ps 26:1**)

- 4) Almost every lament, however, ends with a note of confidence in the Lord's answer, and often a statement or section of praise for deliverance.

- a) See **Psalm 22** and **73** for examples of extended laments with extended praise sections in the latter half.

- 5) A subset of laments are the imprecatory or cursing Psalms. These are characterized by calling down God's judgment on the wicked.

- a) Typically this is only a small portion of a given Psalm, and even some Psalms of praise have imprecations in them (see **Psalm 139**).

- b) We will not include a full discussion of imprecatory Psalms here, but it is important to note that the cursing psalms are never centered on personal vengeance, but rather call out to God, the perfect Judge, to execute justice by punishing the wicked.

### c. Thanksgiving

- 1) A thanksgiving Psalm might be called a “past-tense lament,” in which the psalmist looks back on a time when they cried to God and God answered them.
- 2) The Psalm will often begin with praise.
- 3) The hallmark of a thanksgiving Psalm is the recounting of a past event when the Lord delivered the Psalmist.

I sought the LORD, and he answered me  
and delivered me from all my fears. ...  
This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him  
and saved him out of all his troubles. (**Ps 34:4,6**)

- 4) Thanksgiving Psalms will sometimes contain an address to the congregation, inviting others to trust the Lord and give thanks to Him.

Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!  
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!  
Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints,  
for those who fear him have no lack! (**Ps 34:8-9**)

- 5) Examples: **Psalms 18, 30, 32, 34, 40, 48, 66, 116, 118, 124, 126**

#### d. Trust

- 1) Psalms of trust are set apart by expressions of confidence in God, even though circumstances are difficult and enemies may be present.

In the LORD I take refuge;  
how can you say to my soul,  
“Flee like a bird to your mountain...” (**Ps 11:1**)

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me; (**Ps 23:4a**)

- 2) Examples: **Psalms 11, 16, 23, 27, 46, 52, 62, 75, 91, 121, 123, 125, 131**

#### e. Historical

- 1) Historical Psalms are focused on the recounting of portions of Israel’s history for the praise of God and the instruction of God’s people.
- 2) There is sometimes a theme or point of emphasis in the history. For example **Psalm 105** is a historical Psalm focused on God’s faithfulness, followed by **Psalm 106**, a historical Psalm focused on Israel’s unfaithfulness.
- 3) Examples: **Psalms 78, 81, 105, 106, 114, 135, 136**

#### f. Wisdom / Torah

- 1) Wisdom Psalms are focused either on the word of God (Torah) or a focus on how to live a wise, pleasing life before God.
- 2) There are three primary “Torah” Psalms: **Psalms 1, 19, and 119**.
- 3) Other wisdom Psalms: **Psalms 15, 24, 37, 49, 50, (73), 107, 112, 127, 128**

## g. Royal

- 1) Royal Psalms focus on the king—either the physical king of Israel (David and his descendants), or God as King, or elements of both.
- 2) These Psalms often have multiple layers of meaning, speaking originally of the physical king, but ultimately pointing to Jesus, the King of Kings.
- 3) Examples: **Psalm 2, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132**
  - a) **Psalm 2, 89** and **132** all have particular connections to the promises made to David in **2 Sam 7**.

## III. The Structure of the Psalter

## A. Five Book Organization - The Psalms as Torah

1. The Book of Psalms is intentionally divided into 5 sections (usually called books) using a doxology at the end of Books 1-4. These doxologies are best understood as editorial additions to the end of the collection, and not as part of the original Psalm.

## a. Book 1 closing doxology:

Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,  
 from everlasting to everlasting!  
 Amen and Amen. (**Ps 41:13**)

## b. Book 2 closing doxology:

Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,  
 who alone does wondrous things.  
 Blessed be his glorious name forever;  
 may the whole earth be filled with his glory!  
 Amen and Amen!

The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended. (**Ps 72:18-20**)

- 1) Note that **v20** is likely the conclusion to both Books 1 & 2, which contain the vast majority of David's Psalms. This is a hint pointing to the editorial process of the Psalter—multiple editions over time, as there are David Psalms in Books 3-5, though not nearly as many.

## c. Book 3 closing doxology:

Blessed be the LORD forever!  
 Amen and Amen. (**Ps 89:52**)

## d. Book 4 closing doxology:

Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,  
 from everlasting to everlasting!  
 And let all the people say, "Amen!"  
 Praise the LORD! (**Ps 106:48**)

- e. Book 5 ends differently, with the final 5 Psalms (**146-150**) serving as the final doxology. They all use a "Hallelujah!" inclusio, forming a massive exclamation point of praise to crown the end of the Psalms.

2. The five-book structure is almost certainly crafted to call to mind the Torah, the five books of Moses.
  - a. This gives us a window into one of the purposes of Psalms—to instruct and guide God’s people, as the Torah does. It does this through a very different means than the history and law of the books of Moses. Rather it instructs by using the living examples of God’s people, using their songs, prayers, laments, and praises to model the righteous path of life, one that leads to the praise and glory of God.
  - b. It is notable that the five books of Psalms are punctuated with a five part conclusion (**Ps 146-150**), further reinforcing the 5-part structure.
  - c. It should also be noted that the Books 1-5 are not necessarily to be mapped onto the corresponding 5 books of Moses (Book 1 of Psalms // Genesis, Book 2 of Psalms // Exodus, etc.). Efforts to make this connection seem fruitless. (Robertson 8)

#### B. Signs of Intentional Design: Collections within Psalms

1. To many, the Psalter can feel like a random collection of poems, with no real order or theme guiding their arrangement. However, a careful examination of the placement of the Psalms in the 5 books yields many interesting observations. While we may not be able to pinpoint the reason for the placement of each individual Psalm, there are patterns that emerge when the Psalter is viewed as a whole.
  - a. This is not unlike picking up a hymnal. In the introduction to most hymnals you will find a general guide to the groupings of various hymns. While sometimes the placement of an individual hymn may be necessitated by space on the page or length of the hymn (2 pages, 1/2 page, etc.), there are often groupings of hymns on similar subjects.
  - b. Sometimes it is also apparent when there have been later additions to a hymnal in the editing and publishing process. (See the hymnal *Praise for the LORD*, which is largely arranged alphabetically, but restarts toward the back of the hymnal.)
2. Collections within the Psalms:
  - a. Introduction: **Psalms 1-2**
    - 1) **Psalms 1 and 2**, taken together, seem to be placed as an introduction to the Psalter as a whole.
    - 2) They are two of the only Psalms in Book 1 without a title (**Psalm 10** likely being part of **Psalm 9**, and only **Psalm 33** remaining), setting them apart from the David collection spanning the rest of Book 1.
    - 3) **Psalm 1:1** and **2:12** form a two-Psalm inclusio using the word “Blessed,” bracketing these two Psalms together.
    - 4) **Psalms 1 and 2** introduce two fundamental themes of the rest of the Psalter: Torah and Messiah.
      - a) **Psalm 1** introduces the individual theme of Torah, and the decision each image-bearing human faces—will I walk the path of the wicked or the righteous?
      - b) **Psalm 2** introduces the communal theme of the Lord’s Anointed (Messiah)—will we trust in God, His King, and His rule among the unruly nations?

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b. Book 1: **Psalms 3-41**

1) First David Collection: **Psalms 3-41**

- a) The remainder of Book 1 is almost entirely Psalms of David.
- b) The only exceptions are **Psalm 10** (likely originally part of **Psalm 9**, as they together form one acrostic), and **Psalm 33**, which lacks a title, though it could be a Psalm of David as it is in the midst of a David collection.

c. Book 2: **Psalms 42-72**

1) Sons of Korah Collection: **Psalms 42-49**

- a) This begins a pattern of each new book of Psalms being set off by a change in authorship.
- b) The only exception is **Psalm 43**, which lacks a title, but may be originally part of **Psalm 42**, as they share a refrain.
- c) This collection is followed by a lone Asaph Psalm (**Psalm 50**)

2) Second David Collection: **Psalms 51-71**

- a) This collection contains the bulk of the historical titles (8 out of 13).
- b) The only exceptions are **Psalms 66, 67, and 71**, which are anonymous (possibly David).
- c) This David collection is punctuated with a royal-blessing Psalm by (or for) Solomon (**Psalm 72**).

d. Book 3: **Psalms 73-89**

1) Asaph Collection: **Psalms 73-83**

- a) Aside from Psalm 50, these are all of Asaph's Psalms.
- b) Book 3 is substantially shorter than books 1 & 2, with only 17 Psalms.
- c) Book 3 is the darkest of the 5 books in tone, made up mostly of laments.
- d) Asaph's collection is followed by 4 Psalms, 3 belonging to the Sons of Korah (**84, 85, 87**), and the other Psalm (**86**) being the only David Psalm in Book 3.

2) Heman and Ethan Conclusion

- a) Book 3 ends with two Psalms by (or dedicated to?) Heman (**Psalm 88**) and Ethan (**Psalm 89**).
- b) **Psalm 88** is the darkest of all the Psalms, containing no turn to praise at the end, as laments usually do.
- c) **Psalm 89** is a praise Psalm turned lament, which centers around the promises made to David and their apparent failure.

e. Book 4: **Psalms 90-106**

1) Moses Introduction: **Psalm 90**

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- a) The lone prayer of Moses in the Psalter is situated at the opening of Book 4, and marks a change in tone. From here to the end of Book 5, praise will begin to outweigh lament.
- 2) The *Yahweh Malak* Psalms: **Psalms 93-99**
- a) Most of the Psalms in Book 4 are anonymous (only 3 list an author), but there is a distinct theme in these Psalms: “The LORD reigns!” (*Yahweh Malak* in Hebrew)
  - b) The phrase “The LORD reigns” is found in **Psalms 93, 96, 97, and 99**, but even the intervening Psalms carry on the theme of the Lord’s reign.
  - c) The *Yahweh Malak* Psalms are followed by 4 Psalms, two of which are the only David Psalms in Book 4 (**101, 103**).
- 3) Historical Psalm Conclusion: **Psalms 104-106**
- a) Book 4 concludes with a sequence of 3 historical Psalms
    1. **Psalm 104** is a meditation on the 7-day creation from Gen 1.
    2. **Psalm 105** reviews Israel’s history, focusing on God’s faithfulness.
    3. **Psalm 106** reviews that same history, but focuses instead on Israel’s unfaithfulness, ending with a prayer for the Lord to “gather them from the nations” (**106:47**).
- f. Book 5: **Psalms 107-145**
- 1) Introduction: **Psalm 107**
- a) **Psalm 107**, an anonymous Psalm, picks up where **Psalm 106** left off, calling on those “gathered in from the lands” to praise God (**107:1-3**). The Psalm then depicts four different desperate situations, from all of which the Lord rescues those who call on Him.
- 2) Third David Collection: **Psalms 108-110**
- a) This brief but powerful David collection marks the first sustained sequence of David Psalms since Book 2.
    1. **Psalm 108** is a composite hymn, stitching together pieces of **Psalm 57** and **Psalm 60** to form a new Psalm.
    2. **Psalm 109** is a deep lament, including an extended imprecatory section, also quoted in the New Testament.
    3. **Psalm 110** is a truly unique David Psalm, focusing on the combined roles of King and Priest in an unnamed figure whom David calls “Lord.” This is the most quoted Psalm in the New Testament.
    4. This David collection is followed by two corresponding acrostic Psalms:
      - a. **Psalm 111** is an acrostic focusing on the righteous acts of God.
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b. **Psalm 112** is an acrostic focusing on the righteous acts of the righteous person who is committed to God's ways.

3) The Egyptian Hallel: **Psalms 113-118**

a) According to ancient Jewish tradition, this collection of 6 Psalms was sung during the Passover festival. **Psalms 113 & 114** were sung before the Passover meal, and **Psalms 115-118** were sung after the Passover meal. (Longman, *Commentary* 389)

1. It is likely that when Jesus and His disciples "sang a hymn" after Passover before departing for the Mount of Olives, it was some of all of **Psalm 115-118 (Mt 26:30; Mk 14:26)**.

2. This section of Psalms makes for an excellent study, reading these Psalms from the perspective of Jesus on His betrayal night, taking the Last Supper with His disciples.

4) Celebration of Torah: **Psalm 119**

a) Sandwiched between two collections, this massive acrostic Psalm dominates the landscape of book 5 (even though Book 5 is the longest book, with 44 Psalms).

b) With 8 verses dedicated to each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, this monumental work of art exhausts the "thesaurus" of ways to praise God for His word.

5) The Psalms of Ascent: **Psalm 120-134**

a) There is some debate over the meaning of "A Psalm of Ascents," with some speculation about ascending tones or other musical interpretations, but the general consensus views these Psalms as being used by pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem for feasts and festivals.

1. This generally fits the content of the Psalms, with several of them mentioning the hilly geography and the scene of God's people gathering to worship Him.

2. This also fits the short length of most of the poems, as they would have been easier to memorize and sing while traveling.

b) There are four David Psalms (**122,124,131,133**) scattered throughout the collection, as well as one Solomon Psalm (**127**), which is interestingly situated at the center of the 15 Psalms of Ascent.

c) The Psalms of Ascent are followed by 3 anonymous Psalms:

1. **Psalm 135** is a Psalm of praise featuring a Hallelujah inclusio.

2. **Psalm 136** is the most repetitive Psalm. Apparently the leader would sing the first half of each line, and the congregation would respond with "for his steadfast love endures forever."

3. **Psalm 137** is a bitter lament and imprecation centering on the Babylonian captivity.

6) Fourth David Collection: **Psalms 138-146**

- a) And so the Psalter comes full circle, returning to a final set of 8 David Psalms before the Hallelujah! finale.
  - b) This collection includes the only historical title outside Books 1-2 (**Psalm 142**), and concludes with an acrostic Psalm (**145**).
  - g. Conclusion: **Psalm 146-150**
    - 1) All pain is lost in praise in this jubilant conclusion to the Psalter.
    - 2) Each Psalm begins and ends a Hallelujah! inclusio.
    - 3) The final Psalm (**150**) is a relentless call to worship: “Let everything that has breath praise the LORD!”
3. Names of God in the 5 Books:
- a. It is notable to see different emphases given to different names of God in each of the 5 books, namely *Elohim* (usually translated “God”) and *YHWH* (Usually substituted with “LORD”).
    - 1) Book 1: *Yahweh* - 278x, *Elohim* - 15x
    - 2) Books 2-3: *Yahweh* - 44x, *Elohim* - 200x
    - 3) Books 4-5: *Yahweh* - 339x, *Elohim* - 9x
  - b. This is especially apparent when comparing **Psalm 14** (in Book 1) to **Psalm 53** (in Book 2), two nearly identical Psalms, where *Yahweh* in Psalm 14 is replaced with *Elohim* in Psalm 53.
  - c. It is not clear what to do with this striking information. Perhaps in different editions of the Psalter, as it expanded and grew, different names of God were preferred and became dominant in the corporate worship in different eras.

#### C. Movement from Lament to Praise

- 1. One key feature of the Psalter is the predominance of lament in the first 3 Books, which is superseded by a dominance of praise in Books 4 and 5.
  - a. Individual Psalms tend to move from lament to praise (on a smaller scale), and so does the whole book of Psalms (on a large scale).
- 2. This movement from lament to praise is formative for the use of the Psalms in order. As we bring our laments to God from every situation in life, we gain perspective in His presence, and depart from our worship in a mindset of praise and gratitude.

#### D. Thematic Organization? The Psalms and the Exile

- 1. The Perspective After the Exile
  - a. The Psalms reached their final form during the time after the return from exile, as evidenced by exile and return-from-exile Psalms (**137, 126, 107**).
  - b. A major theological struggle facing the generations from the time of the exile to the time of Christ centered around the lack of a king on the throne of David. God had promised David to seat one of his descendants on the throne forever (**2 Sam 7:13**), and after the exile there was never again an earthly king in Israel. How would God be true to His promises after this devastation?

- 1) Another book compiled during this period is the **Chronicles**. Sometimes the observation is made that there are differences in **Kings** and **Chronicles** because of a difference in purpose.
  - a) **Kings** focuses more on the failure of Israel’s kings and explains how Israel’s unfaithfulness landed them in exile.
  - b) **Chronicles** records the same history, but with a focus on the future hope of God keeping His promises after the return from captivity.
- 2) It is possible that the Psalms were arranged with a similar purpose in mind—to renew faith in God’s promises to David in the coming Messiah.

## 2. *Hesed* - God’s Covenant Faithfulness

- a. A notable word theme that runs through the Psalms is God’s *hesed*, variously translated as “lovingkindness,” “steadfast love,” “mercy,” “loyal love,” etc. But at the root of these descriptions is the idea of God’s unfailing covenant-keeping love for His people, the very thing the exile generation needed to focus on.
  - 1) This description of God is one of the five key character qualities listed in God’s revelation of Himself to Moses in **Ex 34:6-7**.
  - 2) *Hesed* is found throughout the Old Testament, but it abounds in the Psalms:
    - a) The book with the second most uses of *hesed* is 2 Samuel and Genesis at 11x. *Hesed* appears in Psalms 127 times. (247 total times in the OT)
- b. This word is fascinating to trace through the Psalms, but especially at key junctures like **Psalms 89** (used 7 times) and **Psalms 107** (used 6 times).

## 3. A Possible Storyline through the Psalms

- a. One possible key to seeing an overall theme in Psalms is to look at the “seam Psalms”—that is, the Psalms placed at the beginning and end of each book.
  - 1) Noteworthy Psalms seem to be placed at the “seams” of the books, with Psalms like **Psalms 72** (Solomon) and **Psalms 90** (Moses) coming at the very end of the very beginning of different books.
- b. Books 1-2 - The Life, Triumphs, and Failures of David
  - 1) These are predominantly Psalms of David, reflecting on the highest highs and lowest lows of his life (punctuated as a David set by **72:20**).
    - a) Some of the lowest points of David’s life are situated at key points:
    - b) **Psalms 3**, where David flees from Absalom, opens Book 1 (after the introduction of **Psalms 1-2**).
    - c) Book 1 closes with **Psalms 41**, where David confesses sin (**v4**), and has been deeply betrayed by a close friend (**v9** - quoted of Judas in **John 13:18**).
    - d) Book 2 opens with **Psalms 42-43** (Probably originally one Psalm of the Sons of Korah), a song of the depressed where they express longing for the house of God.
    - e) The second David collection (**Psalms 51-71**) opens with **Psalms 51**, David’s confession over his sin with Bathsheba.

- 2) Book 2 concludes with **Psalm 72**, a Psalm by (or about) Solomon, the hope for the future Davidic line. The Psalm brims with hope, but we know how the story of Solomon and the Davidic line spirals downward from there.

c. Book 3 - The Devastation of Exile

- 1) Book 3 opens with **Psalm 73** a deep lament of Asaph wondering why the wicked seem to prosper and the righteous seem to suffer—a similar struggle for the exile generation. He is brought back to his senses by entering the sanctuary of God and regaining perspective of God’s goodness.
- 2) Book 3 is the darkest book of the Psalms, with dark communal laments (**74, 79, 80, 84, 89**) that would fit an event like the destruction of the Temple.
- 3) Book 3 ends with a double whammy, beginning with **Psalm 88**, the darkest of the Psalms. It does not end in praise like so many other Psalms do, but concludes in utter darkness.
- 4) **Psalm 89** follows up with a key lament: What happened to the promises to David?! This was *the* key question of the exile and return. And **Psalm 89** ends on that note of lament:

Lord, where is your steadfast love (*hesed*) of old,  
which by your faithfulness you swore to David? (**Ps 89:49**)

d. Book 4 - Renewed Trust in God’s Kingship

- 1) **Psalm 90**, the prayer of Moses, opens book 4 and seems to offer perspective to the doubts presented in Book 3, particularly **Psalm 89**.

Lord, you have been our dwelling place  
in all generations.  
Before the mountains were brought forth,  
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,  
from everlasting to everlasting you are God. (**Ps 90:1-2**)

Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, (*hesed*)  
that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. (**Ps 90:14**)

- 2) **Psalm 90** seems to be inviting God’s people to step back in time to another seemingly hopeless situation, their nation’s infancy, when one generation’s faithlessness led to massive judgment in the wilderness. But God was their dwelling place through it all, and He still brought them through to the promised land.
- 3) The tone of Book 4 shifts significantly toward praise, a notable change from the predominant laments of Books 1-3.
- 4) The *Yahweh Malak* Psalms (“The LORD Reigns!”), **Psalms 93-99**, are just the thing needed at this point in the development—a renewed trust in God’s kingship, despite the lack of a physical king on the throne.
- 5) Book 4 concludes with a set of historical Psalms, reminding Israel of God’s faithfulness in their story (**Psalm 105**), despite their own faithlessness (**Psalm 106**).

a) **Psalm 106** concludes with a prayer of the exile:

Save us, O LORD our God,  
and gather us from among the nations,  
that we may give thanks to your holy name  
and glory in your praise. (**Ps 106:47**)

e. Book 5 - Anticipating the Return of the Lord's Anointed

1) Book 5 opens with **Psalm 107**, a perfect response to the concluding prayer of **Psalm 106**:

Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,  
whom he has redeemed from trouble  
and gathered in from the lands, (**Ps 107:2-3**)

a) **Psalm 107** opens and closes with *hesed*, and includes *hesed* in each of the four situations of deliverance described.

- 2) And then David returns, so to speak, with **Psalms 108-110**. There is an anticipation in these Psalms, especially **Psalm 110**, of the Son and Lord of David coming to claim His throne and set things right.
- 3) The collections of the Egyptian Hallel (**Psalms 113-118** - connected to Passover), **Psalm 119**'s celebration of Torah, and especially the Psalms of Ascent (**Psalms 120-134**) reorient God's people on looking forward to celebrating His deliverance and His word in His city.
- 4) A final collection of David Psalms (**Psalm 138-145**) brings us full circle back to David, but with a forward-looking hope this time. This final collection seems to answer the last desperate cry of exile in **Psalm 137**.
- 5) The Five-Part Hallelujah conclusion brings us to a final place of praise as we trust God's promises and await His Messiah—what both that generation and our generation need to do.

## Conclusion: Applying the Psalms

### I. Studying the Psalms

#### A. Verse by Verse

1. Appreciate and learn from the Hebrew poetry in every line of the Psalms.
2. Tremendous strength can be taken from meditating on a single verse.

#### B. Psalm by Psalm

1. Study each Psalm on its own, seeing the flow, perhaps identifying a genre.
2. Put the psalm in its historical context if it lists an author and/or event.
3. See how the Psalm is used in the New Testament.
4. See how the Psalm point to Jesus.

#### C. From psalm to psalm, book to book (in order)

## II. Participating in the Psalms

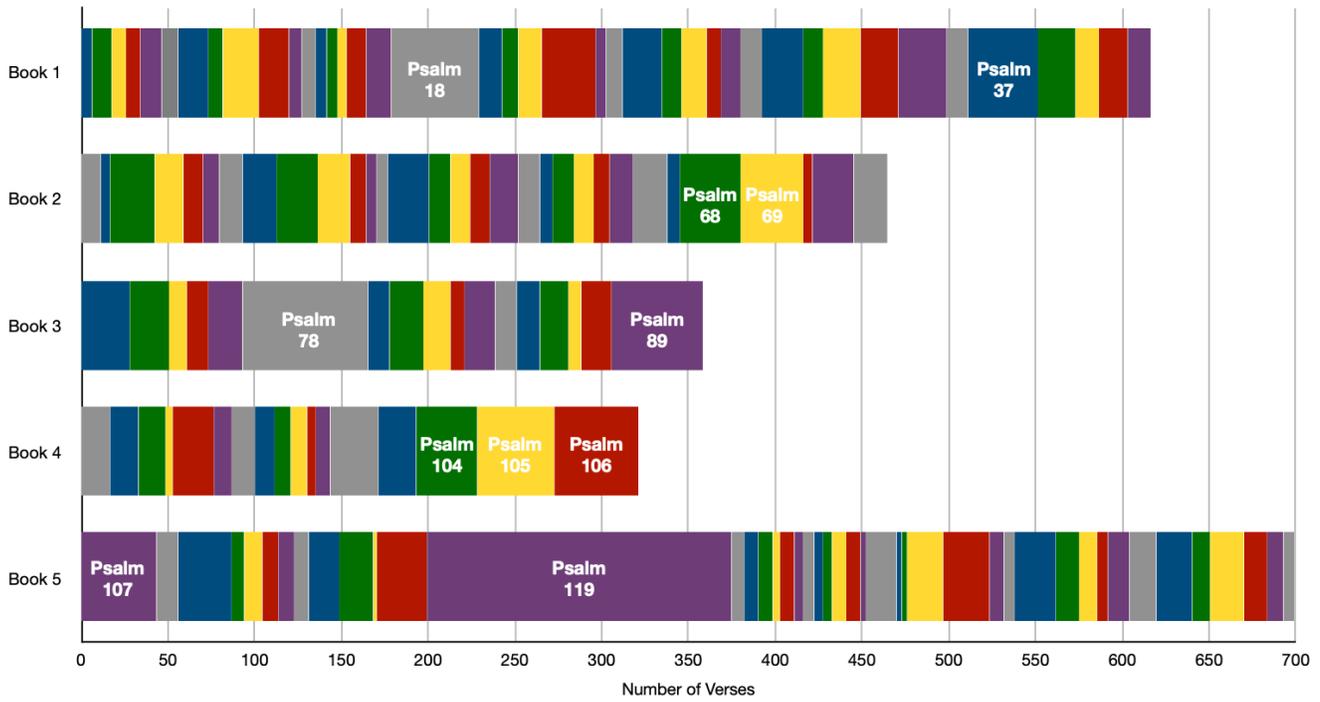
- A. Reading - The Psalms were designed for communal and private use. They are both beautiful and helpful.
- B. Singing - Find Psalms set to music and use them. Make them your own.
- C. Praying - When you find yourself stuck in a “prayer rut,” write out prayers based on the Psalms, using their language to guide your own.
- D. Living - See your suffering and Praise in the Psalms. Trust God and praise Him at all times.

## III. Being Transformed by the Psalms

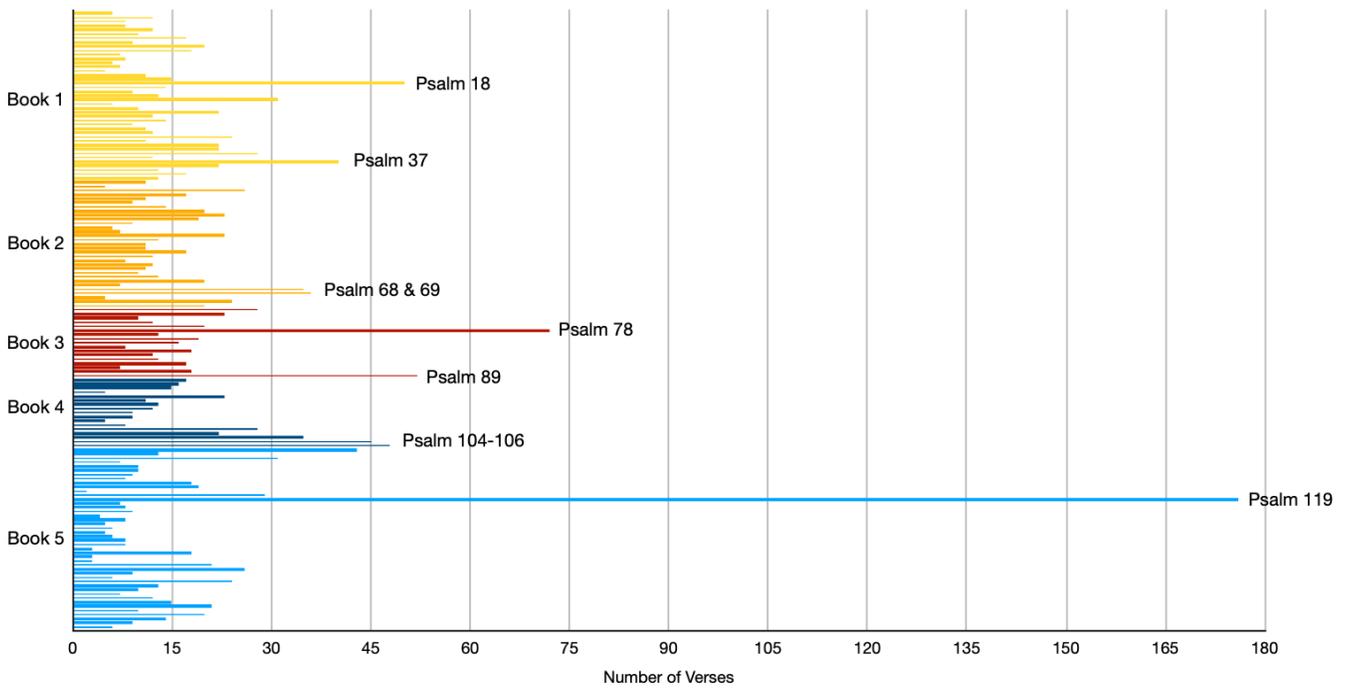
- A. Bringing your whole heart to God. There is no part of us that cannot be shaped by the Psalms.
- B. Trust in the God’s steadfast, covenant-keeping love.

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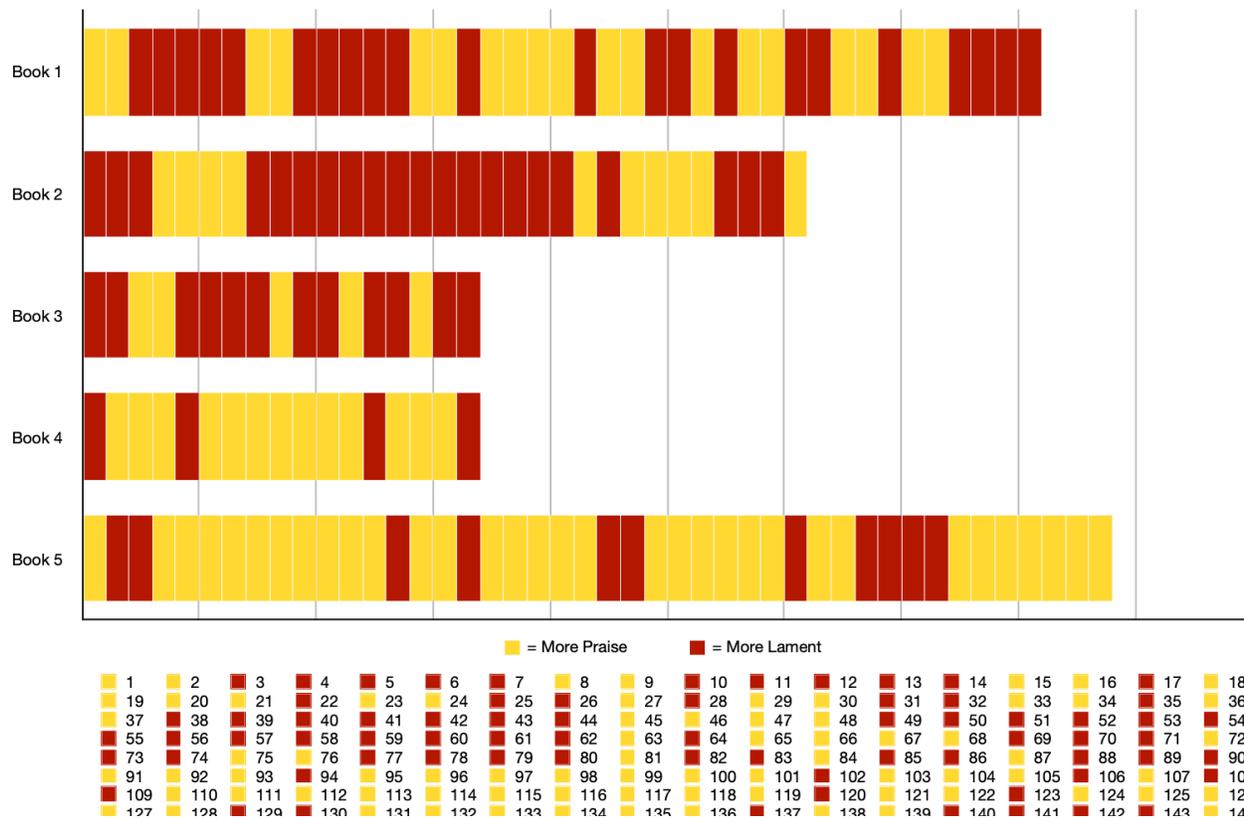
**Verses Per Psalm (By Book)**



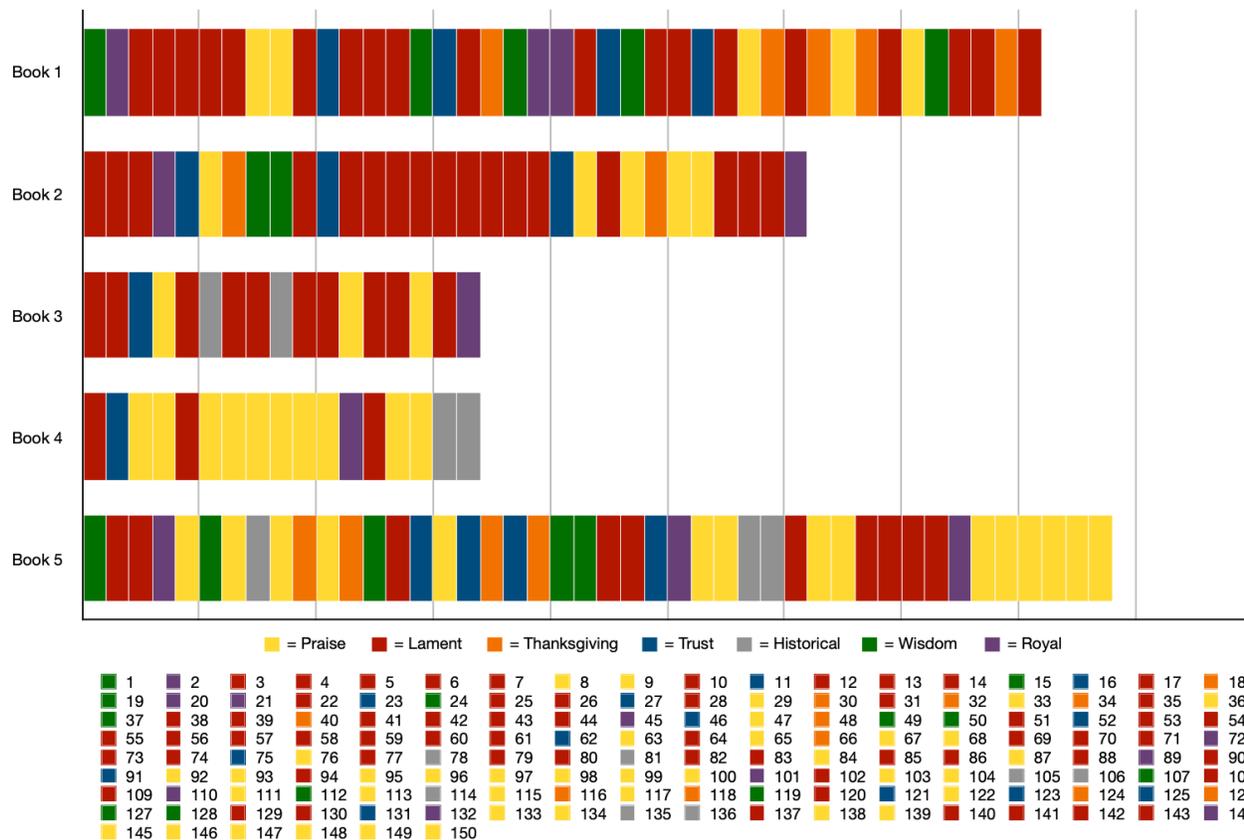
**Verses Per Psalm (By Psalm)**



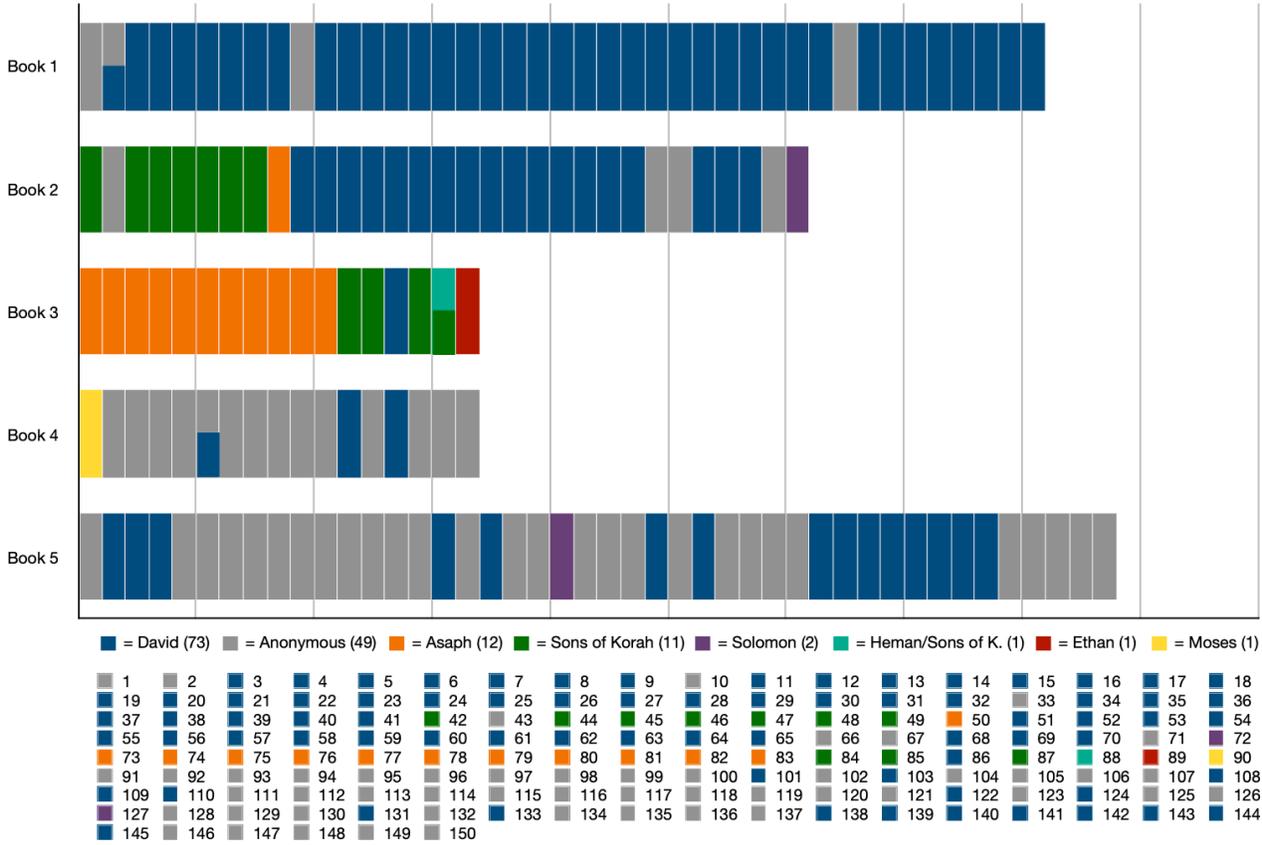
**Praise vs. Lament (Generalization)**



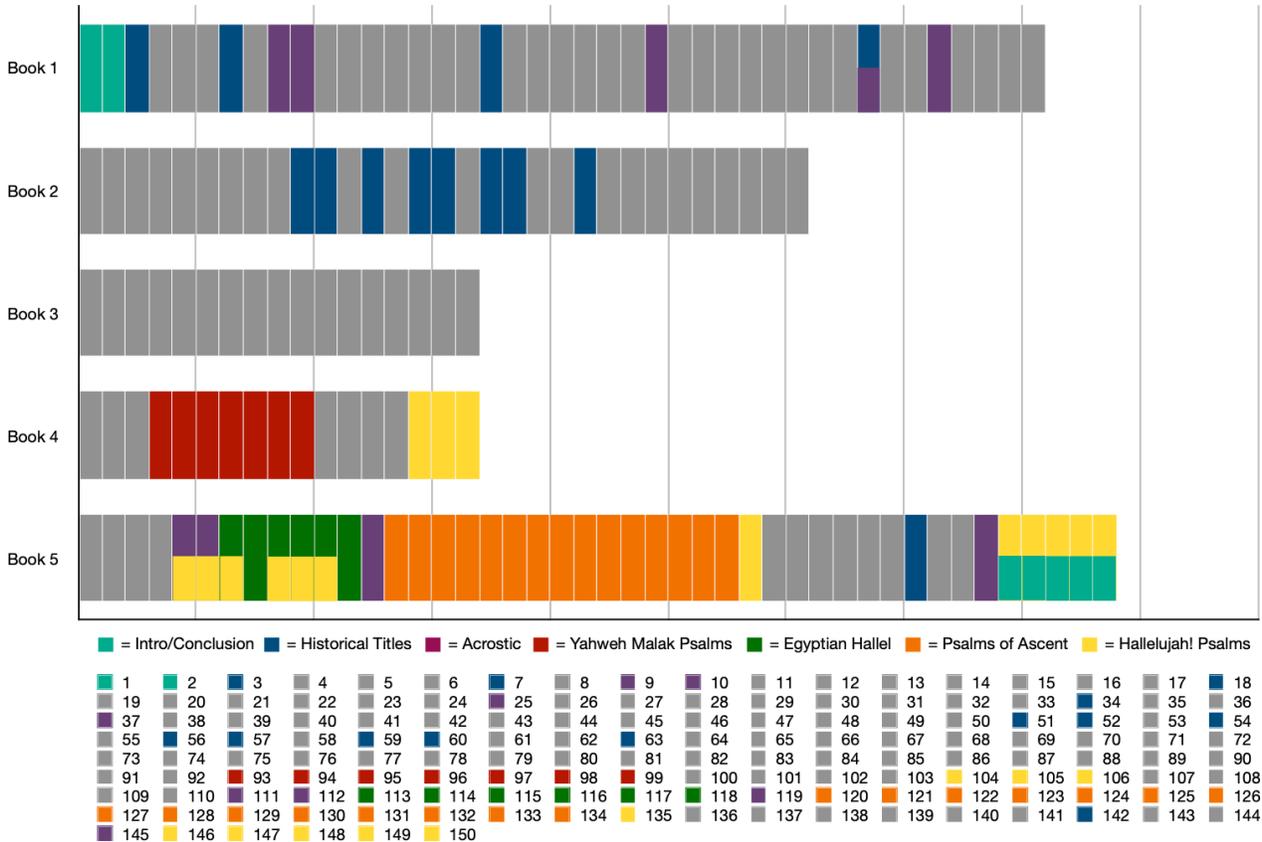
**Genres (Generalization)**



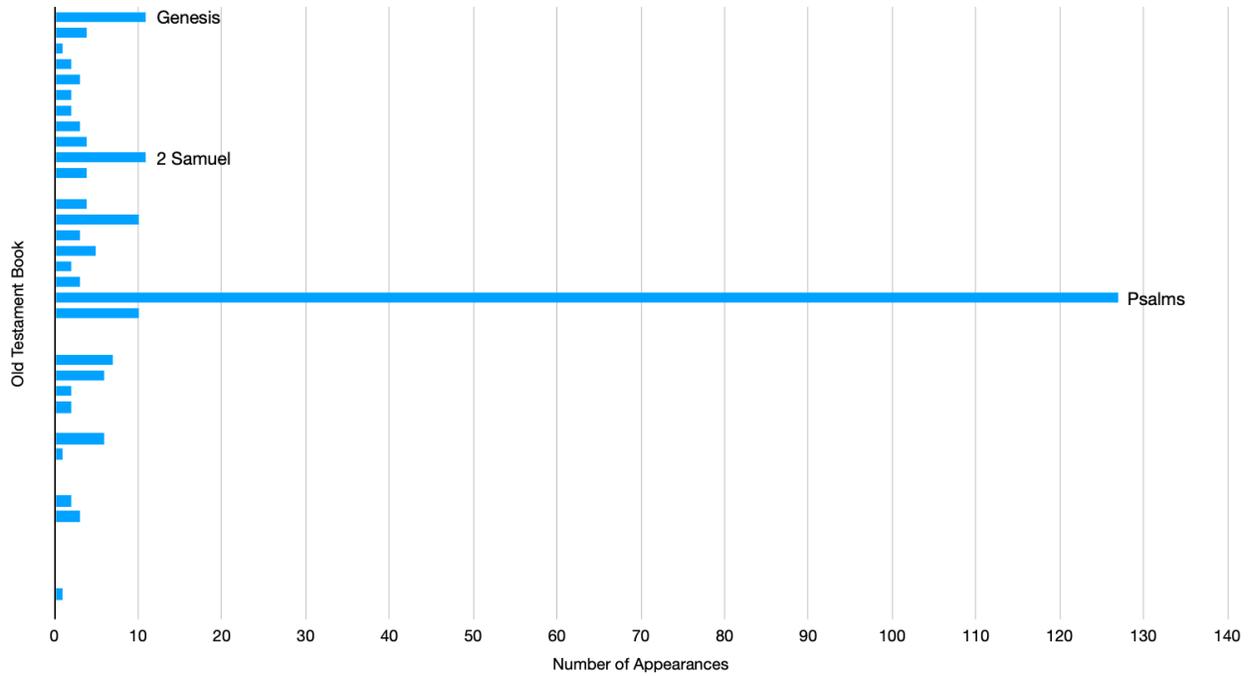
**Authors**



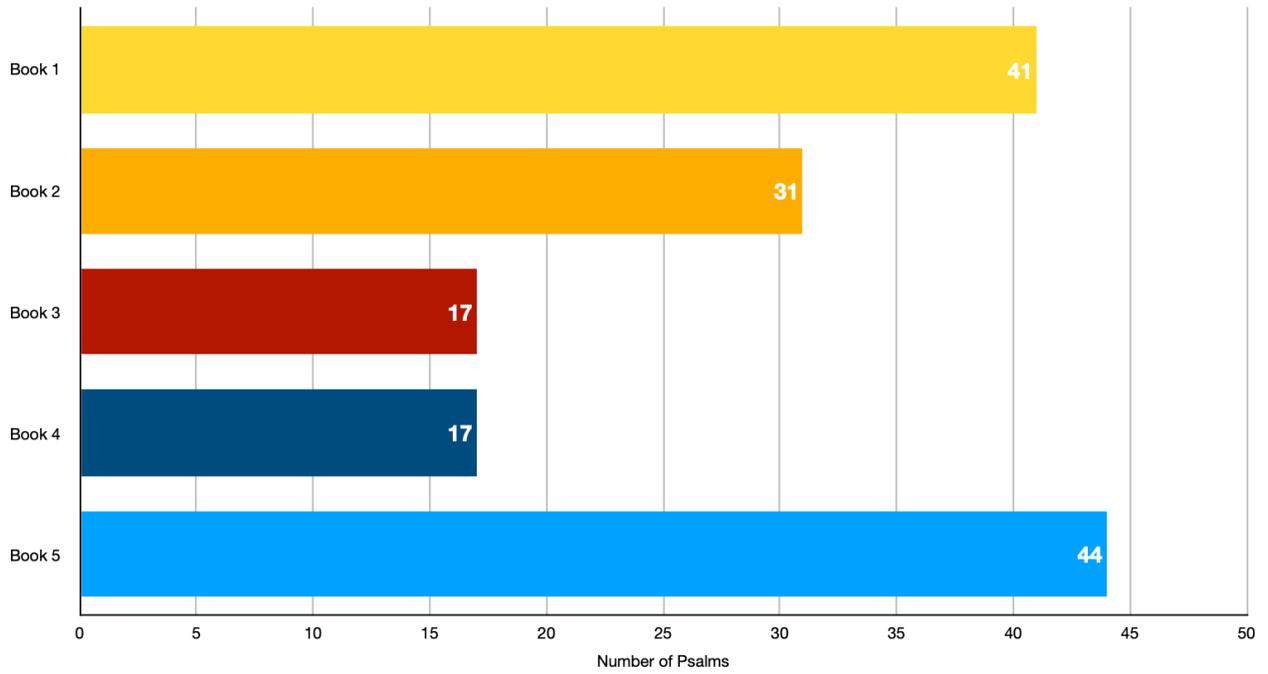
**Collections/Themes**



**Hesed Appearances in the Old Testament**



**Number of Psalms Per Book**



# The Flow of the Psalms

Less Praise, Increasing Lament

89 & 90

Less Lament, Increasing Praise



## Seams and Themes: Trusting God's Hessed after Exile



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## **The Wilderness Psalms**

*Micah Bingham*

**Texts: Psalms 78, 81, 83, 90, 95, 106, & 136, as well as 1 Cor. 10 and Heb. 3-4**

### **Introduction:**

#### **I. The historical psalms' place in the larger context and structure of Psalms**

- A. It goes outside the scope of this presentation to explore Psalter structure in detail, but the book as it appears in our Bibles was likely arranged by an editor living in or just post-Babylonian exile who compiled Psalms' 5 books to help Israel properly cope with the disappearance of David's dynasty and what felt like the loss of God's care.
- B. Notice that the psalms reviewing Israel's history are clustered primarily in books 3 & 4.
- C. Book 3 represents the peak/darkest pages of the psalmists' complaints, and books 3 & 4 together form the turning point of the Psalter, in which reflection on Israel's history provides important truths about God and his people that should inform a righteous person's perspective.
- D. The editor drew from historical psalms that were penned as far back as Moses' day c. 1400 BC and as recently as his contemporaries living near the exilic period in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC.

#### **II. The scope of this study**

- A. The assignment for this presentation was to consider the psalms in which the wilderness years of Israel's history receive particular attention.
- B. The histories in those psalms often smoothly link together samples of God's and Israel's behavior during the Exodus (Ex. 1-13:18), the 1<sup>st</sup> year plus of wilderness wandering (Ex. 13:18-Num. 14), the 38 penal years of wandering (virtually no text devoted to or details given from this period), the last year plus in the wilderness (Num. 15-Josh. 5:10), and the years in Canaan (Josh. 5-1<sup>st</sup> Sam.'s early chapters).
- C. We will, similarly, allow our wilderness survey to include such events as Psalm 78:40ff. and 1 Cor. 10:1-10 deemed closely connected to that period.
- D. This study will limit itself to the psalms identified above and omit others that could reasonably be included in a list of "wilderness psalms" (63, 105, 114, and others).
- E. Attention will also be given to NT texts that either explicate or shed light on the wilderness Psalms, particularly 1 Cor. 10 and Heb. 3-4.

#### **III. "Asaph"**

- A. The perceptive reader will notice that many of the historical psalms are attributed to Asaph.
  - 1. The headings of book 3's first 11 psalms, 73-83, all identify Asaph as their source.
  - 2. Psalm 50 is the one outlying Asaphic psalm.
- B. This designation is likely referring—at least loosely—to the worship leader Asaph appointed by David. See 1 Chron. 6:39; 16; 2 Chron. 29:30.

- C. We appropriately tend to accept such attributions, but some have questioned whether the Asaph David appointed could have written all 11. Consider the following evidence:
1. Psalms 74 & 79, at least, appear to describe Jerusalem's destruction (e.g. 74:3; 79:1).
  2. Asaph was apparently succeeded by descendants and/or worship leaders who followed in his footsteps and are described in 1 Chron. 25:1; 2 Chron. 20:14; and Ezra 2:41 as the "sons of Asaph."
  3. It seems plausible that Asaphic attribution could appropriately be given for songs later produced by someone working in the style/line/guild of Asaph.
  4. This would easily explain the historical psalms' content that seems to know Israel's history centuries beyond the reigns of David and Solomon, when Asaph himself lived.
  5. Counter argument
    - a. Remember that biblical content does not have to have been written after events it describes. God knows the future and can inspire biblical authors to anticipate those events in their writings.
    - b. Cf. Psalm 78:2 with Matt. 13:35.
    - c. Matthew labels the author of Psalm 78 a prophet!
  6. I agree with the suggestion that later writers following in Asaph's footsteps likely wrote some of the psalms attributed to Asaph from which the post-exilic Psalms editor was selecting.
    - a. Our tendency to bristle at scholars questioning biblical authorship attributions is warranted.
    - b. Those critics are often seeking to discredit Bible texts and deny that prophecies were, in fact, prophecies.
    - c. Perhaps one criteria with which to weigh someone's argument for or against authorship attribution is the motivation behind the argument.
      - 1) Be wary of an argument aiming to throw shade on scripture's inerrancy.
      - 2) Give more weight to an exploration of authorship that aims to understand God's truth more accurately.
- D. Common characteristics of the Asaphic psalms
1. They use the name Elohim for God (50x vs. 10 uses of Yahweh).
  2. They typically contain a strong prophetic tone and strong historical elements.
  3. They frequently mention Joseph and his tribes (77:15; 78:67; 80:2; 81:5).
  4. They depict God as Shepherd and Israel as his flock (74:1; 77:20; 78:52; 79:13; 80:1).

#### IV. Reading glasses through which the Psalms ought to be read

- A. The psalmist's message
1. This can be challenging if the author and/or occasion for writing are unknown.
  2. But, regardless of who wrote them and when, these are inspired words. Whether lament, praise, history, or other, each psalm on its own gives us helpful messages that can instruct us, excite us, and inform our prayers.

3. For example, it seems likely Psalm 90, which was penned by Moses, was a prayer he offered on behalf of the Israelites (and perhaps himself) when sins were fresh and the consequences looming (e.g. Num. 14 or 20).
- B. The editor/compiler's thrust
1. It appears that our Psalter's contents were purposefully arranged so as to communicate answers to questions with which a post-exilic Israel wrestled.
  2. Asking questions such as, "Why does this psalm sit here?" or "Does this psalm have a significant link with its neighbors or with another similarly placed psalm?" may help us learn lessons the editor intended to teach. Consider Psalms 89/90 or 105/106, e.g.
- C. The NT writers' commentary
1. Perhaps the most important lens through which to read any OT text is to identify whether an inspired NT writer drew lessons from it.
  2. Joe Works helpfully calls such NT quotations and expositions of OT texts "inspired commentary."
  3. We know we are safe—and well instructed—finding applications the NT authors identified from these psalms.
- D. Psalms' commentary on earlier OT texts
1. The historical psalms recount and reflect on stories from Gen. – Sam.
  2. They identify important lessons from those earlier passages.
- E. "Today": A student examining Psalm 95 and Heb. 3-4 could see instance of all 4 lenses.
1. In Psalm 95, a psalmist writing "long after" (Heb. 4:7) the wilderness generation teaches his contemporaries a lesson based on the events of Ex. 17.
  2. Heb. 3-4 then applies lessons from Psalm 95 to his contemporary readers.
  3. Working backward through our 4 reading lenses, we can observe:
    - a. Psalms' explication of earlier OT texts.
    - b. Hebrews' inspired commentary on Psalm 95.
    - c. The contribution of Psalm 95's placement to the story of the Psalter.
    - d. The picture the psalmist himself paints of joyful praise juxtapositioned with the sober, warning voice of Yahweh echoing back at the worshipers.
- F. We should prayerfully, faithfully, and repeatedly try to read Psalms through these lenses.

## Body:

### I. A journey through some wilderness psalms

#### A. Psalm 78

1. Time of writing and reason for its location in the final Psalter

- 
- a. Based on its critique of Israel's sins, its description of their rejection in vs. 59, and its suggestion in the climactic vss. 67-72 that Judah fared better, it was likely written near the time that Assyria took Israel captive (c. 722 BC).
  - b. However, its exultant conclusion that describes David as God's chosen leader through whom to bless his people seems dissonant with neighboring psalms.
  - c. It lies in book 3, the Psalter's darkest section and one in which the largely individual laments of books 1 & 2 have crescendoed into national lament.
  - d. It sits among the main concentration of Asaphic psalms—a section filled with communal calls to review how God and Israel have treated each other in the past.
2. Primary messages
    - a. Israel has been unfaithful; God has not.
    - b. Review and reflect on God's words and his wonders.
    - c. Obediently trust God because of the wonders he's done.
    - d. Learn from the mistakes of Israel's fathers in the Exodus and wilderness periods.
    - e. Pass these messages on to your children.
  3. Suggested outline
    - I. Call to wisdom (1-8)
      - A. Listen, the Psalmist pleads, as I share important history that displays God's mighty deeds. (1-3)
      - B. God commanded that each generation relay this history to the next so future generations would hope in, remember, and obey God—unlike Israel in the wilderness. (4-8)
    - II. Lessons from Israel's history (9-64)
      - A. Example 1: God delivered Israel from Egypt and brought them through the wilderness with blessing. (9-16)
        1. Israel's faithless response and God's judgment (17-31)
        2. God's unmerited favor to a remnant (32-39)
      - B. Example 2: God delivered Israel from Egypt and brought them through the wilderness with blessing. (40-55)
        1. Israel's faithless response and God's judgment (56-64)
        2. God's unmerited favor to a remnant (65-72)
  4. Select observations from the text
    - a. 1-8
      - 1) With increasing intensity (climactic parallelism), he urges his hearers to listen carefully.
        - a) Give ear → incline your ears || Open my mouth → utter dark sayings
        - b) The end of vs. 4 finally tells what his message is. The anticipation before that revelation suggests what's coming is important!

- 
- 2) Matt. 13:35 says Psalm 78:2 was a prophecy about Jesus.
  - 3) God commanded that the Israelites teach their children his words and deeds.
    - a) Parental indifference or compromise is unacceptable when it comes to teaching our children about God’s wonders.
    - b) Deut. 6:6-9
  - 4) Note the 3-fold goal in vs. 7: each successive generation will rely on, remember, and obey God—unlike the wilderness generation (vs. 8).
- b. 9-16
- 1) Ephraim, most prominent of the 10 tribes, represents the northern kingdom of Israel. See Hos. 4-13.
  - 2) See Ephraim’s hotheadedness in Judg. 8:1ff.; 12:1ff. The point here and in vs. 57 seems to be: “Israel was utterly faithless—to such a shocking extent that it was like Ephraim turning away from a battle.”
  - 3) Shooters of/deceitful and turned back/twisted share similar word roots and represent possible wordplay between vss. 9 & 57. Cf. Hos. 7:16.
  - 4) Vs. 9: They didn’t hope; vs. 11 they didn’t remember; and vs. 10 they didn’t obey. Remember the psalm’s 3-fold aim in vs. 7. Israel is the case study for the author of how to miss those marks.
  - 5) Vss. 12 & 43 mark the beginnings of the psalm’s 2 descriptions of apostasy.
  - 6) Zoan was either Ramses II’s capital city or the surrounding area. Israel likely helped build it (Ex. 1:11).
  - 7) Vs. 11: God’s wonders give sufficient reason for us to trust and obey him.
  - 8) Vs. 14: Cf. Ex. 13:21-22.
  - 9) Vss. 15-16: Cf. Ex. 17:6-7.
- c. 17-31
- 1) 17-20: Cf. Matt. 12, 16; Mk. 8; Lk. 11; Jn. 6.
    - a) In Matt. 16 and Mk. 8:11ff. the Pharisees “test” Jesus and he’s frustrated that their “generation” wants a sign. By that point, the heaviest concentration of signs in Mark have been performed, including the feeding of the 5000 with bread. Jesus warns the disciples not to be influenced by the Pharisees, talks about “hearing.” Jesus is frustrated with the disciples for being slow to catch on, but also says “Do you not yet perceive?” and follows with the partial sight sign. Contrast that with the clear description of the Pharisees as unfaithful.
    - b) Jesus’ generation wanted more and better signs than the ones they had already witnessed, and he was justified in refusing them.
    - c) These Exodus, Numbers, and Psalm 78 texts were likely all in Jesus’ mind throughout the events in John 6.
    - d) In Jn. 6:31 the crowd self-condemningly appeals to Psa. 78:24 (and/or Neh. 9:15).
  - 2) Vs. 18: cf. 1 Cor. 10:9.
-

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- 3) Vss. 19-20
    - a) Cf. Ex. 16; Num. 11.
    - b) The expression “spread a table” is the same as in Psa. 23:5, where the author believes firmly the truth that these people question.
  - 4) “Can God?” merits rebuke (Gen. 18:14; Num. 11:21-22; 2 Kin. 7:1-2; 18-20; Mk. 9:23). God knows the difference between struggling faith (Mk. 8 & 9) and unbelief (Jn. 6:29-30).
    - a) It can be tempting for us to entertain vs. 19-like skepticism.
    - b) Even Moses asked this question (with language strikingly similar to the disciples’ in Mk. 6:37; 8:4, 16).
  - 5) Vs. 21 recalls Num. 11, when Israel bemoaned its misfortunes and dearth of meat. God’s anger was blazing hot, as was the fire he sent through the camp.
    - a) Beware, lest our unbelief prompts God to turn his wonders against us.
    - b) We can become the sobering examples that will warn others to believe.
  - 6) Vss. 29-31
    - a) Vs. 29 references Num. 11:32, where Moses doubted God could really feed all 600k with quail for a month and God issued *plenty*—so much that the person who gathered least accumulated several bushels worth (a pattern quite parallel to Mk. 6, 8).
    - b) Vs. 30: “Craving” recalls Num. 11, which twice said the people craved and twice identified their place of death as “the graves of craving.”
    - c) Cf. Psa. 106:15, where God “sent leanness” into their souls (KJV).
      - 1] He filled their bellies, but they left empty.
      - 2] Contrast that with Christ post-wilderness temptation in Lk. 4:14-15. And cf. Deut. 8:2-3, 16. Jesus did what God had wanted from the Israelites.
      - 3] Jn. 6: The bread God gave was a foretaste of Jesus, the greater bread from heaven who would truly fill us and give eternal life.
  - d. 32-39
    - 1) Cf. Isa. 29:13; Hos. 6:4.
    - 2) God’s patience and forgiveness are incredible.
    - 3) Again, implicit behind Psalm 78’s placement may be an exilic/post-exilic Israel’s question: “Is God no longer faithful to his people and promises?” The psalm’s answer: God’s people are inconsistent; God never is.
  - e. 40-55
    - 1) As if it’s not already clear how the pattern of God’s wonders→Israel’s forgetfulness/craving/rebellion continued cycling, the Psalmist gives us example 2 (example 1 was in vss. 11-39).
    - 2) If we thought God’s judgment in vs. 30 too hasty or Israel sympathetic in 34-35, the emphasis on repetition of rebellion/testing gives the other side.
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- 3) 7 of the plagues are listed here. Clear emphasis is given to the 10<sup>th</sup> plague.
    - a) The purpose of this psalm's history was to give representative—not exhaustive—evidence of God's wonders and faithfulness compared to Israel's unfaithfulness.
    - b) Perhaps the number 7 symbolizes the perfection of God's wonders.
  - 4) Like in 9-16, God's wonders brought Israel out of danger and into a place of safety, peace, and blessing. But if we remember the first example's pattern, we expect their sins that showed they didn't appreciate his wonders followed by God turning his wonders against them, next.
- f. 56-66
- 1) "Rebelled" and "tested" are used heavily in the psalm to describe Israel's sin. Cf. Deut. 21:18 for rebelled (stubborn) and Ex. 17:7 for tested.
  - 2) The 1<sup>st</sup> example focused on God's provision in the wilderness and Israel's shocking discontentment in the face of that kindness.
  - 3) The 2<sup>nd</sup> example (including the description of the plagues, which attacked Egypt's gods) focuses on God's judgment of other nation's "gods" and Israel's paradoxically characteristic sin of idolatry in Canaan.
  - 4) 59-64 refers to the events of 1 Sam. 4. Apparently it was then that God stopped dwelling in the tabernacle (vs. 60).
    - a) Cf. Josh. 18:1 and the disturbing state of affairs at Shiloh by the time of Judg. 21:19-21 and 1 Sam. 2:22.
    - b) See also Jer. 7 (a warning about treating God's dwelling as a talisman that would cover sin—much like Israel did in 1 Sam. 4) and 26:6, 9, 11.
    - c) See also God's glory leaving the temple in Ezek. 8-11. Churches in Rev. 2:5; 3:16 were warned of a similar fate.
    - d) See also Ezek. 24:15-24.
  - 5) 65-72
    - a) Vss. 65-66 reference God's display of power against Philistine gods in 1 Sam. 5.
    - b) At a tragic time of awful sins on the part of Israel and its foes, God's power, steadfast love, and sovereignty shone bright as he carried Israel to its highest highs through the tribe of Judah (a relatively uncelebrated tribe in Judges), Mount Zion (a city that in 1 Sam. 5 was still in enemy hands), and David (an unexpected shepherd boy).
    - c) The story is left unfinished, with implicit invitation to the readers of the Psalmist's generation to listen carefully and remember, to break the cycle, and to act as vs. 7, not as vss. 9-11, described.

## B. Psalm 81

1. Time of writing and reason for its location in the final Psalter
  - a. If written by Asaph himself, then penned c. 1000 BC.

- b. It was likely written—or at least placed in book 3 of Psalms’ final form—during or post-Babylonian exile as Judah struggled to deal with God’s apparent dismissal of the Davidic promises/dynasty.
  - c. Note the implication that God’s people have been exiled in vss. 11-12.
  - d. Note the timing suggested by vss. 1-3: the Psalm was likely written to be used in the 7<sup>th</sup>—and perhaps most important—month of Israelite feasts (contained Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles).
2. Primary messages
    - a. Everyone join in praising God and remembering his wonders and faithfulness. Worship, and be content with, only him.
    - b. Reviewing and meditating on the history between God and his people will help.
    - c. Note that God is the primary speaker for most of the psalm.
3. Suggested outline
    - I. Festal hymn (1-5)
    - II. Oracle of the Lord (6-16)
      - A: God’s past care (6-7)
      - B: Exhortation to listen (8-10)
      - C: God’s judgment on rebellious Israel (11-12)
      - B’: Exhortation to listen (13)
      - A’: God’s offered/future care (14-16)
4. Select observations from the text
    - a. 1-3:
      - 1) The Psalmist calls on all worshipers—singers and musicians in vs. 2, priests in vs. 3—to give joyful praise to God.
      - 2) The sounding of this ram’s horn opened Israel’s 7<sup>th</sup> month (Lev. 23:24).
      - 3) The backdrop of the Feast of Tabernacles makes vss. 10 & 16 especially meaningful.
    - b. 4-5:
      - 1) A couple of tricky statements:
        - a) What is the statute? To offer up praises about God? To listen to God? See the similar decree in 78:5, which appears to be a decree that God’s people tell about his wonders.
        - b) Who is speaking in 5c? Is it a call back to oppression in Egypt and thus appropriate to connect this with Ps. 114:1; Deut. 28:49; Isa. 28:11; Jer. 5:15; 1 Cor. 14:21-22? Or is it a lead-in to the oracle from God in 6ff.? I lean toward the former, partially because of the next 2 points.
      - 2) Note the motif of familiar vs. unfamiliar/foreign/strange running through this psalm. Egypt and false gods should be foreign/strange, while God should be close, familiar, and on Israel’s hearts and lips.

- 3) God is like a mother bird wanting to place good food in his people's mouths; instead, they listen to themselves or to foreign/strange voices.
- c. 6-16
- 1) God is the speaker in this last, and longest, part of the psalm.
  - 2) We hear a reminder of his saving activities, a plea for his people to listen to his voice, a lament that they hadn't, and an implicit plea for the psalm's readers to do better.
  - 3) Vs. 6: God poignantly recollects the mercies he showed Israel in Egypt.
  - 4) Vs. 7: Israel wanted deliverance, but if God's going to deliver you it's going to involve probing into and changing you. They didn't bargain for deliverance → answering → testing.
    - a) Secret place of thunder could refer to: Ex. 14:19-25, or to Ex. 19:16ff.; 20:18ff. (cf. Deut. 4:11-12), or both.
    - b) "Meribah" marks 2 different places where Israel failed desert tests: Ex. 17:7 (1<sup>st</sup> generation); Num. 20:13 (2<sup>nd</sup> generation).
  - 5) Vss. 8-10: This language is reminiscent of Deut. 5, 6, and 32.
  - 6) Note throughout this psalm that heeding God's rules brings beautiful blessing. We get a Psalm 19-like description of God's rules here.
  - 7) Vs. 16: Reminiscent of the Song of Moses in Deut. 32:13-14. See Num. 18:12; Deut. 32:14; Psa. 147:14 for finest of the wheat, Deut. 32:13 for honey from the rock.

### C. Psalm 83

1. Time of writing and reason for its location in the final Psalter
  - a. Was there a particular offensive against Israel that prompted the plea in Psalm 83? See 'select observations' section below for fuller treatment of this question.
  - b. See earlier comments on the editor's reasons for stressing history in books 3 & 4.
  - c. Post-exilic Israel likely felt vulnerable as a small remnant without a strong army or city wall and surrounded by threatening nations that did not want to see them regain power (see Nehemiah). This psalm could have been written in, or an editor could have deemed it relevant for, just such a scenario.
2. Primary messages
  - a. The Psalmist pleads with God to thwart Israel's enemies' conspiracies.
  - b. History forms the basis for his plea. "Because this is how God helped Israel in the past, this is what I can ask and expect him to do now."
3. Suggested outline
  - A: Prayer for God's action (1)
  - B: Plottings of the enemies (2-4)
  - C: Greatness of the opposition (5-8)
  - C': Great acts of God in Israel's history (9-12)

B': Thwarting of the enemies' plans (13-16)

C': Prayer for God's action (17-18)

4. Select observations from the text
  - a. 1-18: A prayer informed by history.
    - 1) There's a threat against God and his people!
      - a) The conspiracy is described thoroughly—with increasing intensity—in vss. 1-5, but the conspirators remained shadowed until vs. 6.
      - b) The identity of the nations is not unveiled until vss. 6-8.
    - 2) Who is threatening?
      - a) 10 nations are listed: Edom, Ishmaelites, Moab, Hagrites, Gebal, Ammon, Amalek, Philistia, Tyre, and Asshur (Assyria).
      - b) This is relevant in determining when the psalm was written.
      - c) Asshur/Assyria seems an unlikely choice for inclusion as a threat to Israel unless the psalm was written post-900 BC.
      - d) Is there an OT episode that matches this 10-nation threat?
    - 3) 2 possible explanations
      - a) Many suggest the 2 Chron. 20 threat Jehoshaphat faced from a group that included Edom and was headed by Moab and Ammon was similar.
        - 1] It is true that an Asaphite prophesied Jehoshaphat's victory in 20:14ff., and that Levite singers had a role in the story (20:19, 22).
        - 2] But the Levitical singers weren't Asaphites, and they were singing a snippet of Psalm 136, not 83.
        - 3] Further, this enemy list is much longer than the list in 2 Chron. 20.
      - b) It has also been suggested that these nations are representative of the troublers (Edom, Ishmael, Moab, Hagrites, Ammon, Amalek, and Philistia), the seducers (Gebal—in Phoenicia, not south of the Dead Sea—and Tyre: remember the influence Phoenicia's Baal worship and materialism had on Israel), and the oppressors (Assyria) of Israel.
        - 1] This explanation is intriguing and at least gets closer to the truth.
        - 2] The number 10 could easily represent a totality of enemies.
        - 3] If these nations were placed on a map they would fully encircle God's people.
          - a] Edom, Ishmael, Moab, Hagrites, Ammon to the south/east
          - b] Amalek, Philistia to the south/west
          - c] Gebal, Tyre to the north/west
          - d] Assyria to the north/east
    - 4) I would argue, rather, that these nations are broadly representative of the perennial aggression by the world against God and his people, but that the

Psalmist (writing sometime after Assyria gained power) did have 2 specific OT texts in mind as he penned this poem: Judg. 1-8 & Gen. 11.

a) Judg. 1-8

- 1] Judges 1-8 could have sourced this psalm's cast of characters.
  - a] Judg. 3:13-14 Ammon, Amalek, and Moab
  - b] Judg. 3:31 Philistia
  - c] Judg. 5:4 Edom
  - d] Judg. 6-8 Midian/Ishmaelites/Hagrites (Cf. Gen. 37:28, 36)
  - e] Judg. 1:30-31; 3:3 Gebal/Tyre
  - f] In Psalm 83:8, the author addends his list with Asshur, who is not found in Judges but has arisen later. See more below about the inclusion and description of Asshur in this list.
  - g] Judg. 4 Sisera, Jabin at the river Kishon
  - h] Judg. 1:27 Endor
  - i] Judg. 7-8 Oreb, Zeeb, Zebah, and Zalmunna
- 2] The verbiage—not just the cast—echoes Judges.
  - a] “Raised their heads” Judg. 8:28
  - b] “Dung” Judg. 3:22
  - c] “Make them like whirling dust” Judg. 7:13

b) Gen. 11

- 1] At the Tower of Babel a coalition of men said, “Come, let us make a *name* for ourselves.”
  - a] It seems the Psalmist here recalls that story as relevant as the enemies he's facing aim to eliminate Israel's *name*.
  - b] By the end of the psalm his prayer will be that these people come to know God's *name* in vss. 16 & 18.
- 2] The Psalmist knows that the Babel story ended with God scattering the conspirators and thwarting their aims. In 83:13 he prays that God will likewise scatter Israel's enemies.
- 3] The Tower of Babel story occurs just after some interesting information in Gen. 10 about the origin of Babel.
  - a] Babel and Ninevah (the capital city of Assyria) were both built by Nimrod, a descendant of Ham (from whom the Canaanites listed in Psalm 83 generally descended).
  - b] According to common thought and to Josephus, Asshur, who was a son of Shem (Gen. 10:22), settled at Ninevah, became a leader there, and called his followers Assyrians.
  - c] Thus, in the mind of our Psalmist, it was surprising and telling in 83:8 that a son of Shem (Asshur) should have joined

forces with the descendants of Ham (Canaanites) in targeting his relatives the Israelites (it was from Shem that the Israelites descended).

- 5) After reflecting on the past, the Psalmist switches abruptly to present tense for the 1<sup>st</sup> time in vs. 18 as he arrives at a firm belief about the present: “You alone, whose name is the Lord, are the Most High over all the earth.”
- b. Note there is no mention of Jael, Deborah, Barak, or Gideon in the psalm. The historical psalms tend to diminish humans’ roles in great deeds and attribute power and trustworthiness to God.
- c. The writer’s hope in vs. 16 that these enemies (who wanted to exalt their name and exterminate Israel’s) would ultimately seek God’s name is admirable.

#### D. Psalm 90

1. Authorship of the psalm is attributed in the heading to “Moses, the man of God.”
  - a. 5 other Bible texts describe Moses as “the man of God”: Deut. 33:1; Josh. 14:6; Ezra 3:2; 1 Chron. 23:14; 2 Chron. 30:16.
  - b. There is no clear reason to question that Moses penned the psalm, and several reasons to believe it.
    - 1) The psalm contains echoes of early Genesis passages: references to creation, the fall, and lifespans of antediluvians.
    - 2) It contains language akin to Deut. 32-33, Moses’ song and final blessing.
    - 3) Moses was a man of songs, as evidenced by Ex. 15 and Deut. 32.
2. Time of writing and reason for its location in the final Psalter
  - a. This humble, fervent plea from a heart aware of man’s frailty and faults sounds like a prayer Moses might have offered for the people in Num. 14, much like his song in Deut. 32 was for a people about to enter Canaan (cf. Deut. 31:19, 21!).
  - b. This psalm opens book 4, just after the national crisis in book 3 and strong complaint in Psalm 89.
    - 1) Book 4 contains the heaviest concentration of Psalms’ references to Moses.
    - 2) It zooms out from a focus on David’s dynasty to reflect on God as seen in creation and in his interactions with the patriarchs and early Israel.
    - 3) Reading Psalm 89 followed by Psalm 90 is a bit like reading Job’s later complaints followed by God’s response and Job’s confession in Job 38-42.
3. Primary messages
  - a. God is eternal and faithful while we are flawed and frail.
  - b. Only if God favors us with mercy will our lives and efforts have meaning.
4. Suggested outline
  - A: The Lord is God (1-2)
  - B: God’s authority over people (3-6)
  - C: God’s wrath (7-10)

C': Proper response to God's wrath (11-12)

B': Prayer for God's mercy (13-16)

A': May the Lord be our God (17)

5. Select observations
  - a. Time is discussed extensively. See at least vss. 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15.
  - b. Matthew Henry notes that the Psalmist:
    - 1) Comforts himself and his people with thoughts of an eternal God and his interest in them (1-2).
    - 2) Humbles himself and his people by reflecting on man's frailty (3-6).
    - 3) Submits himself and his people to God's judgment (7-11).
    - 4) Commits to God through prayer for wisdom, return of God's favor (12-17).
  - c. Moses offers 5 requests in vss. 12-17.
    - 1) Teach us to number our days so we can get wisdom.
    - 2) Return and have pity on us.
    - 3) Show us steadfast love so whatever days you choose to grant will be joyful.
    - 4) Let us and our children see your wonders.
    - 5) Establish the work of our hands.
  - d. The repeated prayer in vs. 17 serves as a powerful plea for God to change the truths about humans earlier in the psalm (withering grass, our years ending like a sigh, burnt up by God's wrath, engulfed by sleep).
  - e. In the context of a passage about Christ's return at the end of time, 2 Pet. 3:8 quotes Psa. 90:4 and applies it to Jesus.

#### E. Psalm 95

1. Authorship
  - a. Anonymous until Heb. 3-4.
  - b. Heb. 3:7 attributes authorship of Psalm 95 to the Holy Spirit and 4:7 to God.
2. Time of writing and reason for its location in the final Psalter
  - a. Moses lived c. 1400 BC.
  - b. The Hebrews author links Psalm 95 with the time of David.
  - c. It is one of several psalms early in book 4 that affirms God is reigning on his throne as king and has authority to judge the earth.
3. Primary message
  - a. A communal call to praise is capped with a warning statement from God referencing the faithlessness of the wilderness generation.
  - b. See Heb. 3-4 discussion below for the lessons the NT draws from this psalm.
4. Outline

## I. 1-7c

A. Outside the temple court:

B. Summons to praise (1-2)

1. Choral response (3-5)

C. Inside the temple court:

1. Choral response (6)

D. Summons to praise (7a-c)

## II. 7d-11

1) Reflection on Yahweh's judgment

## 5. Select observations from the text

- a. Contrast the good "Come, let us..." statements in these psalms and other scriptures with the bad ones (e.g., Psalms 2 & 83, Gen. 11). There are some helpful applications to find in tracing such a theme.
- b. For "today," cf. Deut. 4:40; 5:3; 6:6, 24; 7:11; 9:3; 11:2. These Deuteronomy passages are surely background for Psalm 95 (and Heb. 3-4).
- c. Worshiping God involves telling him he is great; it also involves listening to him.
- d. The reference here is likely to Ex. 17, not Num. 20, as it was the 1<sup>st</sup> generation that was disallowed entrance into Canaan (although Heb. 3-4 will suggest that the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation didn't enter God's final rest either).

## F. Psalm 106

## 1. Authorship

- a. No author is assigned to 106 in Psalms; however, vss. 1, 47, and 48 are recorded in 1 Chron. 16 and seemingly attributed to David in that text.
  - 1) That 1 Chron. 16 song also includes large portions of Psalms 105 and 96.
  - 2) It seems likely that the Chronicler (likely Ezra or a contemporary of Ezra—see the end of II Chron./beginning of Ezra), writing in the post-exilic period, used samples from these 3 psalms to compile a song representative of one David might have commissioned for Israelite corporate worship.
  - 3) It is widely believed that anonymous psalms were often attributed to David on the basis of his importance and proficiency in writing psalms and establishing the use of psalms in Israelite worship. See Heb. 4, 1 Chron. 16.

## 2. Timing and reason for its location in the final Psalter

- a. See vs. 47. It appears this psalm was written during Judah's Babylonian exile.
- b. Like Psalm 78, its recitation of the history between Israel and God from Egypt through the Canaan years is relevant for an Israel in bondage needing direction.
- c. Psalms 105 and 106 both review wilderness history and prove a fascinating pair. 105 observes God's faithfulness and success; 106 watches Israel navigate the same period and cites its many failures.

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- d. Psalm 106 closes book 4 with a humble acknowledgement of Israel's history and God's power and goodness. Book 5 will begin with a resounding cry of praise.
  3. Primary messages
    - a. God is worthy of more praise and thanks than we are capable of giving.
    - b. God's steadfast love endures forever (vs. 1), so (vss. 2 & 48) we should try to honor him unceasingly with our actions and words.
    - c. Sin hinders our prayers and praises.
    - d. We rely on God to save us so that we can praise him well (vs. 47).
  4. Suggested outline
    - A: Invocation to praise (1-2)
    - B: Prayer for God's salvation (3-5)
    - C: Acts of God's love: salvation (6-12)
    - D: History of Israel's unbelief and God's judgment (13-43)
    - C': Acts of God's love: restraint (44-46)
    - B': Prayer for God's salvation (47)
    - A': Invocation to praise (48)
  5. Select observations from the text
    - a. By the time we read to Psalm 106 in our psalter, we've encountered 3 detailed reviews of Israel's exodus to Canaan history: 78, 105, and 106.
      - 1) As we ask ourselves what we ought to learn from the historical psalms, it's telling that these 3 psalms give 3 very different messages.
      - 2) 78 is didactic (instructive): you (and your children and their children...) need to avoid making the mistakes the wilderness generation made.
      - 3) 105 is hymnic: When you examine the wilderness years, you can't help but be awed at God's power and goodness.
      - 4) 106 is penitential: God's people are flawed and unable to praise him as he deserves. They rely on his restraint and salvation to find worth, happiness.
    - b. Vs. 6: The psalmist doesn't emerge from a wilderness history review wagging his finger, but humbly confessing his own similar sins and asking for God's help.
    - c. His eager calls to praise in vss. 2 & 6 are tempered by realizations of the barrier standing between the people and perfect praise—their sins.
    - d. Israel's sins in the pre-wilderness period are outlined in vv. 6-12 and mixed with descriptions of God's patience.
    - e. Vs. 7a seems surprising but is adequately explained by Ex. 4:1, 8; 5:20-21; 6:9.
    - f. 7b references Israel's sin at the Red Sea's edge in Ex. 14:11.
    - g. In vss. 13-36 6 of Israel's sins are chosen as representative examples from the wilderness period.

- 1) 13-15: Complaints about water (Ex. 15:22-24; 17:2), bread (Ex. 16), and meat (Ex. 16, Num.11). The consequence: “leanness into their soul” (KJV).
  - 2) 16-18: Korah’s rebellion in Num. 16
  - 3) 19-23: The golden calf in Ex. 32 (cf. Deut. 9:8-12)
  - 4) 24-27: Refusal to enter Canaan in Num. 14 (Note the warning referenced from Lev. 26:33 in vs. 27.)
  - 5) 28-31: Idolatry with Moab in Num. 25
  - 6) 32-33: Complaint about water and Moses’ sin in Num. 20
- h. Vss. 34-46 cover the Canaan years. Cf. 2 Kin. 17:17; 21:16; Jer. 3:1-3.
- i. Vss. 34-39 show the steps Israel took down the road to apostasy—starting with something that perhaps didn’t seem so bad but ending in horrors.
- j. Vs. 47 suggests that Judah was in exile when the psalm was penned.
- k. Rom. 1 likely draws specifically from Psalm 106.
- 1) 106:20 is quoted in Rom. 1:23.
  - 2) 106:14 echoed at 1:24; 106:39 at 1:26-27; and 106:48 at 1:26.
  - 3) Cf. vss. 23, 32, 40 with Rom. 1:18.
  - 4) 106:41 may be behind Rom. 1:24, 26, and 28.

#### G. Psalm 136

1. Authorship: anonymous
2. Timing and reason for its location in the final Psalter
  - a. The use of the phrase “The God of heaven” in vs. 26 suggests this book was written in an exilic or post-exilic period. See note below.
  - b. Also note this psalm’s proximity to Psalm 137, which was clearly exilic.
  - c. Psalms 136 and 138 form a poignant, powerful bookend around 137.
  - d. Psalm 136 joins 78, 105, and 106 in surveying Israel’s history extensively.
  - e. Like 105, its purpose is primarily hymnic.
    - 1) It is, perhaps, more imperatival in its determination to praise God for his steadfast love.
    - 2) This fits the book’s move from looking around and questioning God to an strong note of praise.
3. Primary messages
  - a. You can look at any event in history from creation to present and what is common to every one is God’s steadfast love.
  - b. Thanksgiving is the appropriate reaction to such a review of history.
4. Suggested outline
  - I. 1-3: Call to praise
  - II. 4-9: Creation hymn: God’s steadfast love as displayed in creation \_\_\_\_\_

- A. 4-6: of heavens and earth (space)
- B. 7-9: of day and night (time)
- III. 10-22: Redemption hymn: God’s steadfast love as displayed in history
  - A. 10-15: Egypt to Red Sea
  - B. 16: Wilderness
  - C. 17-22: Canaan
- IV. 23-25: Summary in reverse order
  - A. 23-24: History (redemption hymn)
  - B. 25: Creation (creation hymn)
  - C. 26: Call to praise
- 5. Select observations from the text
  - a. This is an imperatival, antiphonal hymn in which each line’s 1<sup>st</sup> colon was likely sung by a temple soloist or choir and then its 2<sup>nd</sup> as a congregational response.
  - b. “The God of heaven” occurs only here in the book of Psalms. It was apparently a later designation for God (cf. Ezra 1:2; Neh. 1:4; 2:4; Dan. 2:44).
  - c. Truly, God has shown unceasing lovingkindness to his people throughout history.
    - 1) In every detail of creation
    - 2) In every detail of the Exodus and wilderness periods
    - 3) In his giving the land of Canaan to his people
    - 4) In his dealings with me
  - d. We balk, and rightly so, at modern hymns that are filled with repetition when the repeated phrases bear little relation to the rest of the hymn or when they comprise the entirety of the lyric. Such is not present here. The thoughtful reflection on each separate detail of history followed by a heartfelt affirmation that this event/deed, too, is evidence of God’s love, shouts a powerful message.

## II. NT commentary on the wilderness events

### A. 1 Cor. 10

- 1. Paul’s wilderness illustration (10:1-14) in the context of chapters 8-10
  - a. In 8-10, Paul forbade his readers from eating idol meats in the idol temple.
  - b. Rather than stating this briefly, he arranged his instruction in a way that would teach the Corinthians how to think through such an issue in a godly way.
    - 1) A carnally minded person would simply ask, “Do I want to do it?” when deciding how to act. An immature Christian might add just one more filter: “Am I allowed to do it?”
    - 2) Paul wanted the Corinthians to filter their thinking further by weighing how an action might affect a brother and whether it would honor God.
    - 3) In chapter 8, he argued that even if they had a right to eat meat at an idol feast they should be willing to abstain to avoid hurting their brethren.

- 4) In 9:1-23, Paul showed that he himself had the rights to accept pay for preaching and to be free from all, but that he gave up those rights in order to serve and save others.
  - 5) In 9:24-10:14, Paul used two illustrations (athletics and the Israelites in the wilderness) to establish how incredibly high the stakes are in trying to gain an inheritance in the kingdom of God, and how important it is for a Christian to be focused and careful.
  - 6) Paul wanted the Corinthians to think, before availing themselves of a right, about its impact on their brethren and the stakes of their spiritual race; he also wanted them to ask whether such an action would glorify God. In 10:15-22, he answers that regarding eating idol meats with an emphatic no. Instead, it would represent communion with demons and therefore wasn't their right in the first place.
2. Lessons the Corinthians needed to learn from the Israelites in the wilderness
    - a. All the Israelites had parallel advantages to what we have as Christians.
      - 1) They were baptized as they passed from slavery into freedom.
      - 2) Christ was with them and provided the things they needed.
    - b. Failure in the wilderness was the result.
      - 1) Strong emphasis in the text on *all* of them having the above benefits, but also on some of them (understatement—603,548 of 603,550) falling.
      - 2) He references the golden calf in Ex. 32, testing Christ in Num. 21, sexual immorality in Num. 25, and grumbling in Ex. 15-16 and Num. 14, 16.
    - c. Don't think you're above failure or temptation-proof.
      - 1) When we want to do something, we often underestimate dangers/temptations or overestimate our spiritual strength.
      - 2) In the case of the idol feasts, their determination to participate was setting them up for temptations to engage in idolatry and sexual immorality—or to test Christ and grumble if Paul forbade their attendance.
      - 3) Paul says that the wilderness stories were recorded to show us the importance of not desiring evil!
      - 4) There are 2 possible mindsets in such a situation: 1. I'm going to go above and beyond to make sure I stay far from anything that could get between myself and pleasing Christ (Paul's mindset in chapter 9) or 2. I'm going to do what I want and trust that I can stay clear of evil.
      - 5) In vs. 13 Paul is not saying, "Choose option 2 and God will make sure you're not tempted too badly." Vs. 14 makes clear what Paul means by vs. 13, and which option he expects them to choose...
    - d. Use the escape! Flee!
  3. Note that Paul's references to principles from the wilderness are not limited to 1-14.
    - a. Cf. 10:20 (where Paul has moved on from "Let concern for your brother's soul and your desire to take extreme precaution to avoid sin color your decision making" to "Don't do this because it's sinful") with Deut. 32:15-18.

b. Cf. 10:22 with Num. 25:10-13.

B. Heb. 3-4

1. 1 Cor. 10 targeted Christians who were tempted to use freedom in Christ to serve fleshly desires. In a sense, Heb. 3-4 targeted an opposite temptation: its readers were tempted to leave Christ to go back under the yoke of the law of Moses. In both cases, the wilderness generation and Christ provided helpful warnings.
2. The argument in Heb. 3-4
  - a. In Heb. 1-2, the author argues that Christ is superior to the angels and urges his readers to hold fast to salvation in Jesus.
  - b. In 3:1-6, he argues Jesus is also greater than Moses.
  - c. In 3:7ff. he shows that Israel failed to accept the rest God offered them in Moses' day and urges his readers to heed God's word and remain faithful to Christ, through whom God's rest is still available.
  - d. He uses, for his exhortation, an explication of Psalm 95.
    - 1) Strikingly, as he begins quoting Psalm 95 (vs. 7), he tells his readers that the H.S. is currently (1<sup>st</sup> century AD) speaking through the words of that text.
    - 2) 3:7 and 4:12-13 bookend the Psalm 95 exploration and powerfully show the importance of later generations applying such an ancient text to themselves.
    - 3) His warning is for "today." The Hebrews author says the H.S.'s use of that term in Psalm 95 suggests that God's rest was still unclaimed and available in David's day and continues to be available in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.
      - a) He's saying that through the Psalmist the HS is speaking to readers in the Messianic Age and encouraging them to enter the rest that for so long has gone unshared by God and his people.
      - b) "Today" is not only a quotation from Psalm 95; it is also likely an allusion to Psalm 2:7, which Hebrews 1 had just quoted and connected with the Messianic age.
    - 4) Why did the wilderness generation fail to enter God's rest according to Heb. 3-4? The text gives at least 3 descriptions of the same problem:
      - a) Unbelief (3:19; 4:2 (Sharp contrast to Moses and Jesus in 3:2, 5-6))
      - b) Disobedience (3:18; 4:6, 11)
      - c) Hardness of heart (3:8, 15)
    - 5) How could the 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians—and us—successfully enter the rest?
      - a) He emphasizes the importance of avoiding the 3 problems listed above. We must believe (3:12; 4:3), obey (4:11), and avoid letting our hearts grow hard (3:12, 15; 4:7).
      - b) He also suggests the following:
        - 1] Fear (4:1). As in 1 Cor. 10, recognize the stakes and the poor track record of those who have gone before.
        - 2] Care and effort (3:12; 4:11).

- 3] Daily exhortation to resist sin's deceitfulness (3:13).
- c) 3:14 suggests that they had already started. They were out of Egypt and just needed to trust God through the wilderness. Entering God's rest is a process that we begin and then continue until we enter the final rest.
- C. Notice, in both texts, the emphasis on the continuing relevance of the wilderness examples and lessons throughout history—even to current situations.
1. 1 Cor. 10 states repeatedly that those events were to provide a model and to be instructive for later generations.
  2. Heb. 3-4 has a strong thread of the living activity and relevance of the message in the wilderness texts and Psalms. Note such phrases as: "the H.S. says," "today," "we see," "good news came to us just as to them," "it remains for some to enter it," "there remains a Sabbath rest," and "the word of God is living and active."
- D. And notice that the firm, sobering warnings of both texts are followed by tender, encouraging assurances that God wants us to succeed and will give us the help we need. See 1 Cor. 10:13; Heb. 4:14-16.

### III. Other notable Bible characters in the wilderness

1. Tracing thoroughly the wilderness experiences of faithful individuals in scripture is a worthwhile exercise, but outside the scope of this paper.
2. One might consider, for example, Adam, Noah, Moses, David, Elijah, and John the Baptist, as well as the following NT stories:
  - a. Matt. 8:1-13: Jesus descends from the mountain after giving the law, and instead of finding faithless Israel worshiping a calf he finds a leper and a centurion who trust, based on his previous wonders, that he can help them.
  - b. Matt. 17 & Mk. 9: Jesus descends from the mountain after an experience in which his face shone and he talked with Moses and Elijah (2 men who had memorable wilderness experiences themselves) about his upcoming passion. He finds at the bottom a man who begins to "test" Jesus ("If you can do anything"), but then, seeking to replace his skepticism with faith, cries out, "I believe; help my unbelief!"
3. It seems noteworthy that after the pervasive wilderness theme in the OT each of the 4 gospels begins with John the Baptist preaching repentance in the wilderness.

### IV. Jesus and the wilderness

#### A. Jesus' wilderness temptation

1. All men spend time in "the wilderness." We've mentioned several examples above of Bible characters who did, and the repeated emphasis in scripture is that current and future generations need to learn from wilderness examples in the past because they will continue to be relevant.
2. Fittingly, then, Jesus, who is the fulfillment of all OT writings and was tested in all points as we are (Heb. 4:15), began his ministry by entering the wilderness (after leaving Egypt and passing through the water, in Matthew's account).
3. While there, he fasted 40 days and 40 nights, and then faced 4 temptations from Satan which well paralleled the tests Adam, Israel, and all of us face in the wilderness:
  - a. Fleshly craving (Matt. 4:2-4; see, e.g., Gen. 3:6a; Psa. 78:18, 30)

- b. Testing God (Matt. 4:5-7; Gen. 3:1b; Psa. 78:18-20; 95:9)
- c. Desire for unapproved authority (Matt. 4:8-9a; Gen. 3:5b; Psa. 81:12; 106:16-17)
- d. Worshiping false gods/idols (Matt. 4:9b; Gen. 3:1a, 6; Psa. 78:58; 106:19-20)

#### B. Paradise Regained

1. John Milton, the 17<sup>th</sup> century religious poet, wrote the famous epic “Paradise Lost,” chronicling Adam and Eve’s sin in the garden and expulsion from rest with God.
2. A few years later, he penned a sequel: “Paradise Regained.”
  - a. One might expect the subject of that sequel to be the cross or judgment day.
  - b. In fact, it’s about the tests Jesus faced—and passed—in the wilderness.
  - c. Milton recognized there is a powerful significance to the events detailed in Matt. 4 and Luke 4.
  - d. For our sakes, Jesus faced the temptations we face and succeeded where we fail. He contented himself wholly with God. He listened to, obeyed, trusted, and worshiped God alone. He turned away and defeated Satan.

### V. Applications for our time in the wilderness

#### A. God takes us, as he took Israel, Jesus, and all men, into “the wilderness” for testing.

1. All men from Adam forward have fallen prey to the temptations described above.
  - a. We crave physical ease and pleasure.
  - b. We decide God isn’t trustworthy unless he gives us evidence of his faithfulness in the present that improves on the evidence he’s given in the past.
  - c. We decide we should be in control of the way things go.
  - d. As we grow impatient and unsatisfied with God, we choose to worship idols.
2. So God puts us in difficult situations, and asks that in those times we look to him to find help and fulfillment, no matter how hard those times are or how long they last.
3. God has the right to test us because we’ve proven untrustworthy, not vice versa. Cf. Psa. 78:18, 41, 56; 81:7; 95:9; 106:14; 1 Cor. 10:9; Heb. 3:8-9; 4:12-13.

#### B. God never gives us more than we can handle.

1. 1 Cor. 10:13. Cf. this verse with Ex. 13:17-18, e.g. How many times has God protected me—without my realizing it—from obstacles too big for me to overcome?
2. Psalm 136’s repeated claim is so true. Cf. Ex. 13:22. God is always there loving us, even when we’re so alone that we, like Elijah, could hear him if he whispered.
3. Our wilderness tests can feel so daunting—as though we’re certain to starve, the obstacles are giants to our grasshoppers, or we’re utterly alone.
4. Beware of relying on what we’re seeing or feeling in the moment for information. In Ex. 14:8 the Israelites were defiantly, triumphantly leaving Egypt feeling great. The Egyptians were beaten and plundered, and the Israelites were free. Then 14:10—2 verses later—and looking around gave a different picture.

#### C. And yet the wilderness times can feel very hard and/or very long.

1. When I look around the wilderness it can seem so bleak that I think: “Surely God doesn’t care what I’m feeling, has forgotten me, or is unable to handle this problem.”
  2. A large percentage of psalms are laments for a reason.
  3. It’s ok to feel that way. The message of the Psalms is not, “Life’s never that hard; that’s just your illusion.”
  4. But neither is it, “God sometimes forgets us and it’s ok to complain or be skeptical that he’s going to help.”
  5. God wants us to tell him how hard it is, but he wants us to come to him with the attitude: “God, this is how it feels, but I know this is who you are and what you can do and have done. I believe; help my unbelief.”
- D. Will we imitate Israel or Christ in our wilderness tests?
1. We will not pass the tests perfectly, as Christ did.
  2. But we can look up to his example of faith and endurance and aim to imitate it.
  3. We can spend time reviewing and meditating on the poor examples of the wilderness generation that Psalms 78, 81, & 95, as well as 1 Cor. 10 & Heb. 3-4, warn us to heed.
  4. And we can learn from the good examples and attitudes we see faithful men exhibiting in Psalms 83, 90, 106, and 136, as well as texts such as Mk. 9:24.
- E. In the wilderness, God is testing us—and he’s helping us. He’s stripping us of the things we think we need and inviting us to draw closer to him—to enjoy truly good things.
1. Psa. 81:10, 16; 90:14-17
  2. Jam. 1:2-4, 12; 1 Pet. 4:1-13, 19
  3. If what we want is more physical stimulation/pleasure, more authority and say in how things should go, better evidence that God’s worth trusting than he has shown us in the past, or enjoyment of this earth’s physical shadows of the spiritual realities to come—if we think we’d have it better if we follow Satan’s path to fulfillment—than rest with God in heaven won’t be the place for us.
- F. Teach our children, teach our children, teach our children.
1. There is, perhaps, no more important reminder to take away than this.
  2. Tell our children—frequently, diligently, and excitedly—who God is, what he’s done for us, and how important it is to cling to him through the wilderness.

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## David's Life, & His Heart Exposed

*Joe Works*

**Text: 1 & 2 Samuel; Psalms 3, 18, 22, 23, 24, 30, 32, 41, 51, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, 96, 105, 106, 142**

“There is a Psalm for every emotion.” – Bob Waldron

- I. The Psalms of David show us how to put into words our cares, fears, joys, and praises. Having a working knowledge of where various Psalms fit in the events of David's life help us to see not only what he was thinking but also how we can/should respond in similar situations.
  - A. David's life is told two parts.
    1. David the anointed 1 Samuel 16-31
      - a. David is called from the sheepfold.
      - b. Goliath is the arena to distinguish between Saul and David.
      - c. God protects, prepares, and provides for David to become king.
    2. David the king 2 Samuel 1 – 1 Kings 2
      - a. David establishes Jerusalem as the capital and center of worship.
      - b. The Son of David is foretold.
      - c. David sins, repents, and suffers.
      - d. The sons of David fall short.
        - 1) Amnon
        - 2) Absalom
        - 3) Adonijah

**We will strive to match, chronologically, the Psalms with the life of David. Unless otherwise noted, the Jewish titles are accepted as reliable.**

- I. Psalm 23: A summary of David's life and trust in Yahweh
  - A. Some of the greatest leader/servants of the Old Testament knew, intimately, the relationship of shepherds and sheep.
    1. Abraham (Genesis 13:2; 24:35)
    2. Joseph (Genesis 37:2)
    3. Moses (Exodus 3:1)
  - B. How fitting it is that the first time we see David he is “keeping the sheep” (1 Samuel 16:11).

1. David's confidence when facing the giant was founded on God's protection of him and his flock ( 1 Samuel 17:33-37).
  2. Nabal was a foolish shepherd and David learned valuable lessons from Abigail (1 Samuel 25).
  3. The Northern tribes accepted that David had shepherded/ruled them even during Saul's reign (2 Samuel 4:3).
  4. God described David as "following the sheep" to "ruler over My people" (2 Samuel 7:7-8).
  5. Nathan used David's shepherd/sheep experience to convict him of his sin with the wife of Uriah (2 Samuel 11-12).
  6. The Israelites were sheep that David deeply cared for and mourned their suffering for his sin (2 Samuel 24:17).
- C. Psalm 23 is a Psalm for the living, not for the dead.
1. This Psalm is often reserved for graveside readings. Certainly that is not sinful, and may even be appropriate and comforting.
  2. David saw Yahweh as his Shepherd throughout his life. The Psalm should be read, meditated on, applied, and appreciated while we live.
  3. God's action is emphasized throughout the Psalm. The sheep are helpless and in need. God makes and leads (v.2), restores and leads (v.3), comforts (v.4), prepares and abundantly anoints (v.5), provides goodness, mercy, and a home forever (v.6). Therefore, the Shepherd provides all I need, in Him I have no lack.
  4. Mark 6 paints Jesus as the fulfillment of Psalm 23
    - a. Jesus saw them "as sheep without a shepherd" (v.34).
    - b. He began to teach (restore) them (v.34).
    - c. They were told to lie down in the green grass (v.39).
    - d. He prepared a meal (table) for them (v.41).
    - e. They were fill and had leftovers (cup running over) (v.42).
    - f. Jesus stilled the waters (vs.45-52).

## II. 1 Samuel 19:11-17 and Psalm 59

- A. Saul sought to have David killed. The plan was to watch the house, capture David and kill him the next morning. Michal informed David and aided his escape.
- B. Reading Psalm 59 you can picture David, looking out the window, talking to God about what is unfolding.
  1. "For look, they lie in wait for my life" (v.3).
  2. David sees them coming and going, plotting to take him, like wild dogs hunting food (vs.3, 6, 14-15).
  3. As when he faced Goliath, David puts his trust in Yahweh.
    - a. He cries out to God to deliver him (vs.1, 2).

- b. While in a vulnerable structure, he sees God as his “fortress” (vs.9, 16, 17).
4. When faced with danger, may we have awareness and concern (vs.1-4, 6-7, 14-15). combined with the awe and confidence (vs.5, 8-13, 16-17) of David.

### III. 1 Samuel 21:10-15 and Psalms 56, 34 and 35

A. One of the weaker times in David’s life, he has panicked and lost his trust in God. He seeks security with Goliath’s sword (vs.8-9) and refuge with the Philistines (v.10).

B. David quickly discovers that safety is not found in the enemies’ camp (vs.11-13).

#### C. Psalm 56

1. David’s realized that men are not to be trusted to give aid.
2. Trust is the theme in this Psalm (vs.3, 4, 11), especially in verse 9, “This I know that God is for me.”
3. God is to be praised (vs.4, 10, 12).

#### D. Psalm 34

1. David tried things on his own (1 Samuel 21) and failed miserably. Even in the mess David created, God heard his cries and delivered him (vs 4, 17, 19).
2. Considering David’s state of mind in 1 Samuel 21, it is challenging to understand his usage of “righteous” throughout this Psalm (vs.15, 17, 19, 21). Perhaps verses 4 and 6 highlight David’s confession of behaving in fear, but ultimately turning to the LORD.
3. Peter showed great appreciation for Psalm 34.
  - a. V 8                      1 Peter 2:3
  - b. Vs 12-16              1 Peter 3:10-12
  - c. David and the sojourners of the dispersion shared similar challenges of suffering at the hands of wicked men. Peter encourages his readers to apply the lesson of Psalm 34.
4. David’s words here help us to express our understanding of God delivering ourselves, sometimes in spite of ourselves.

#### E. Psalm 35

1. The timing of Psalm 35 is less certain but perhaps should be read together with Psalm 34.
  - a. The angel of the LORD (Psalm 34:7; 35:5, 6) is mentioned nowhere else in the Psalms. Perhaps this is intended to show the two-fold purpose of the angel – protect the faithful and pursue the wicked. See also 2 Kings 6:8-23.

### IV. 1 Samuel 22 and Psalm 142

A. David is in hiding, alone in a cave.

1. His brothers come to him. His father’s house go down to where David is. David gains a small army.
2. What a stroke of luck for David. Or was it something else?

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B. Psalm 142

1. Not only is David alone in the cave, he is also lonely. David is burdened with the feeling of abandonment (v.4).
2. His anguish is on full display:
  - a. "I cry", "With my voice" (v.1)
  - b. "I pour out", "I declare" (v.2)
  - c. "My spirit fainted" (v.3)
  - d. "no one acknowledges", "no one cares" (v.4)
  - e. "I cried" (v.5)
  - f. "my cry", "brought very low" (v.6)
  - g. His soul is in prison (v.7)
3. David closes with hope and purpose. David longs to praise Yahweh with others
4. The Lord answered David's prayer, likely, exceedingly abundantly above all that he asked or thought (Eph 4:20).
5. Who do you know that is a cave, alone and lonely, crying to the Lord? May we be their brothers.

V. 1 Samuel 22:21-23 and Psalm 52

- A. David made some very poor choices in 1 Samuel 21. The devil took advantage of that and Doeg slaughtered a number of holy men.
- B. This Psalm is written to Doeg or Saul, or both. It certainly applies to countless evil servants of Satan who oppress and devour those who are weaker.
  1. Wicked men boast in their power and ungodly deeds (vs.1-4).
  2. But God will have the last word (v.5).
  3. The righteous should take note of those who trust in their own evil might and ways (vs.6-7).
  4. Contrary to the Doegs of the world, David focuses on trust and praise at such times (vs.8-9).

VI. 1 Samuel 23:14-29 and Psalm 54

- A. David saves the city Keilah but the Lord reveals that they will betray him to Saul (1 Samuel 23:1-13).
- B. David flees to the Wilderness of Ziph
  1. God has determined that Saul's hand will not prevail.
  2. Jonathan, Saul's son encourages David that he will prevail.
  3. The conflict is between Saul and David, but the men of Ziph insert themselves into the fray, choosing what appeared to be the powerful side.

4. Saul is “distracted” by the real enemy, the Philistines, and David escapes.

C. Psalm 54

1. Those involved in the events surrounding this Psalm are manifest.
  - a. “Strangers” (v.3) = the Ziphites and Keilahites
  - b. “Oppressors” (v.3) = Saul and his army
  - c. “those who uphold my life” (v.4) = Jonathan
2. David knows he needs the Lord.
  - a. “Your name” (vs.1, 6)
  - b. “Your strength” (v.1)
  - c. “Your faithfulness” (v.5)
3. It should be clear that the enemy’s issue is with the Lord and not David (v.3b).
4. David does not fail to see those who are helping him as having favor from God (v.4).
5. David once again expresses hope to be able to offer up to God, sacrifices and praise (v.5).

VII. 1 Samuel 24:1-22 and Psalms 57 (and 108)

- A. David and his men are in a cave. Saul uses that cave as a bathroom. In a most vulnerable position, Saul is easy prey for David but David refuses to raise his hand against God’s anointed. Waiting until Saul had left, David showed evidence to Saul that he could have killed him if he wanted. Saul humbles himself in the moment, realizing David is to be king.

B. Psalm 57

1. Perhaps this Psalm belongs to the events of 1 Samuel 22:1. Little in the text pinpoints the exact cave incident.
2. The Psalmist gives great emphasis to trusting in the Lord instead of himself, thus making 1 Samuel 24 a likely timeframe.
3. David is surrounded by dangers but the whole Psalm presents David with a resolve to wait on the Lord and praise Him for His greatness.

C. Psalm 108

1. This Psalm is a compilation of Psalms 57 and 60.
  - a. Psalm 108:1-5 is from Psalm 57:7-11.
  - b. Psalm 108:6-13 is from Psalm 60:5-12.
  - c. What a great example of how these words can fit multiple situations.

VIII. 2 Samuel 5:11-12 and Psalm 30

- A. “No good deed goes unpunished”, surely David must have wondered. God had promised David the throne. The road to that throne was paved with thorns. David suffered mightily. From the time tried on Saul’s armor until Saul’s armor was stripped from him, Saul had jealously sought to kill him.

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- B. Even after Saul’s death the throne seemed uncertain. Ishbosheth, Abner, and Joab complicated David’s coronation.
  - C. Eventually the nation was reunited (2 Samuel 5:1-5).
  - D. Jerusalem was reclaimed, to be the place where God would put His name (Deuteronomy 12:5ff; Joshua 10; 2 Samuel 6-9).
  - E. David became great and his house is built (2 Samuel 5:11).
  - F. “David knew ...”. (2 Samuel 5:12) His faith in Yahweh caused him to continue through “the valley of shadow of death”. But now David KNEW.
  - G. Psalm 30
    - 1. David’s overwhelming joy in the Lord is as clearly manifested in this Psalm as any other.
    - 2. David must rejoice, praise, sing, and shout (vs.1-3)!
    - 3. God has fulfilled His word to David (vs.4-5).
    - 4. The One who created the world is worthy of fear and awe (vs.6-9).
    - 5. No nation or people could thwart His plan (vs.10-15).
    - 6. Neither David, nor anyone else is rescued by force or might, but by the love and mercy of God (vs.16-19).
    - 7. Can you see David, perhaps looking out from his new house, not to the land but to the heavens as he closes this Psalm with hope (vs.20-22)?
    - 8. Like David, we pray through our troubled times. May we, like David, show gratitude for that which He has done for us.
- IX. 2 Samuel 6:15; 1 Chronicles 16:7-36 and Psalms 105:1-15; 96; 106:1-2  
See Micah Bingham’s material on these Psalms.
- X. 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 89  
See Tommy Peeler’s material on this Psalm.
- XI. 2 Samuel 8:1-14; 10:1-19 and Psalms 60 and 22
- A. The title of Psalm 60 informs us that the events of 2 Samuel 8:1-14, David fighting on one front, and 2 Samuel 10:1-19, Joab leading other forces in battle, happen concurrently.
  - B. The nation of Israel had never before been so powerful and secure, and yet this is when enemies seek to weaken David’s throne.
  - C. Fighting wars on two fronts presents the David and his soldiers with a much more difficult situation.
  - D. Psalm 60
    - 1. The historical events paint a picture of victory over opposition.
    - 2. The words of David fill the canvas with concern and a sense of abandonment by God.
-

3. David sees the actions of his enemies as being judgment from Yahweh (vs.1-3).
4. David continues to see God as the source of deliverance and pleads for His hand (vs.4-5).
5. God responds! (vs.6-8).
6. Compare the locations mentioned in the Psalm with the travels of the Israelite army.
7. Who will lead David to conquer Edom? God will (vs.9-12). And He did (2 Samuel 8:14).
8. The spiritual application here is both fearful and hopeful. When our actions bring evil forces against us, let us plead to God for salvation, acknowledging our inadequacies.

#### E. Psalm 22

1. It is most difficult to attribute any time period in David's life to the extreme language of this Psalm. Some have suggested, therefore, that this Psalm is wholly Messianic.
2. However, reading any number of situations when David's life was in peril, sometimes even steps away from capture and death, it is quite possible to imagine the language of Psalm 22 being uttered.
3. It is placed here because of the similarities of beginning verses with Psalm 60.
4. Also note that Bashan is mentioned (v.12), land which was in the hands of the Syrians during some of this time. The Syrians are a main enemy in 2 Samuel 8 and 10.
5. The Psalm is easily divided in two sections: verses 1-21a and verses 22-31, separated by one statement, affirming God answered the cry of the Psalmist/Sufferer.
6. Each sections begins with lines that are quoted and attributed to Christ
  - a. Psalm 22:1      Matthew 27:46
  - b. Psalm 22:22    Hebrews 2:12
7. How much of this Psalm applies to David is uncertain. All of it applies to Jesus, and the final verses (vs.29-31) to us. Praise Yahweh!

#### XII. 2 Samuel 11-12 and Psalms 51, 32 (Psalms 6 and 38 may also fit this occasion)

- A. David has subjugated his enemies, except for Ammon. It is the height of David's reign. David relaxes his moral compass and Satan is ready with the temptation of a beautiful woman, Uriah's wife.
  - B. David spirals into more and more sin. He compromises his army to murder one of his "mighty men" (2 Samuel 23:39). David takes the widow into his house covers up his sin.
  - C. "... be sure your sin will find you out." (Numbers 32:23).
  - D. Nathan confronts David with the most appropriate and piercing parable possible, a shepherd/sheep comparison (2 Samuel 12).
- #### E. Psalm 51
1. This Psalm reveals the difference between Saul and David. Saul continually made excuses for his sins (1 Sam 13:11; 15:15-21) David's heart and spirit are broken, and he admits his sin, when confronted with it.

2. Nearly every synonym for “sin” is used in this Psalm: “transgressions” (vs.2, 3, 13), “iniquity” (vs.2, 5, 9), “sin” (vs.2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 13), “evil” (v.4), “bloodguiltiness” (v.14)
3. David needs Yahweh to recreate him. “wash” (vs.1, 7), “cleanse” (vs.2, 10), “purge” (v.7), “create” (v.10), “renew” (v.10), “restore” (v.12)
4. It must be the Lord’s doing: “wash me” (v.2), “cleanse me” (v.2), “purge me” (v.7), “wash me” (v.7), “make me” (v.7), “create in me” (v.10), “restore me” (v.12), “deliver me” (v.14)
5. David sees the eminent danger of being away from God: “do not cast me away” (v.11); “do not take away” (v.11)
6. David knows that sacrifices are no substitute for obedience (v.16), yet if he is granted salvation God will accept his offerings of righteousness.

F. Psalm 32

1. Notice the parallel emphasis of words with Psalm 51.
  - a. “transgression” (vs.1, 5), “sin” (vs.1, 5), “iniquity” (vs.2, 5), “bones” (v.3), “teach” (v.8)
2. This Psalm gives us insight into David’s heart both before Nathan confronted him (vs.3-4) and after his Psalm 51 confession (vs.1-2, 5).
3. David said he wanted to teach others (Psalm 51:13). He follows through in this Psalm (vs.8-11).
4. Paul makes use of this Psalm in Romans 4:5-8. Like David, we either have an account full of sin or righteousness, our faith determining the choice.

- G. “David’s sin should put upon their guard those who have not fallen, and save from despair those who have.” – Augustine

XIII. 2 Samuel 15:13ff and Psalms 3 and 63

- A. Absalom has stolen the hearts of the people and even part of David’s administration (2 Samuel 15:1-12).
- B. David knows he must flee the city in order to spare the city (2 Samuel 15:13-14).
- C. Psalm 3
  1. David has survived the persecutions of Saul and the wars from many nations, but the people question whether God is with him now (v.2), based on the odds against him (v.1).
  2. Unlike 1 Samuel 21, David sees Yahweh as his protection (vs.3-4).
  3. Living as a fugitive in his own land, David is able to have a level of peace that can only come from knowing that God is in control (vs.5-6).
  4. The devouring enemy is toothless against David’s Savior (vs.7-8).
- D. Psalm 63
  1. A wilderness Psalm could apply to David’s flight from Saul (1 Samuel 21ff) or the current consideration, Absalom’s rebellion.
  2. His use of the word “king” in verse 11 suggests that this is the correct time period of David’s life.

3. David sees God as Water, Living Water (vs.1-2).
4. David thinks of God early in the morning (v.1) and late at night (v.6).
5. David knows that his oppressor will suffer defeat.
6. The Psalm perfectly reflects David's quiet resolve and trust in the hand of God (v.8).

#### XIV. 2 Samuel 22 and Psalm 18

- A. David's ultimate Psalm of victory.
- B. So many of the verses are echoes from previous Psalms of David.
- C. David attributes his victories to two major factors:
  1. He was faithful to God (esp. vs.21-28)
  2. God is all-powerful to defend David (esp. vs.8-16)
- D. It is clear, as David reflects on the battles of his life, God served as both his protector/defender and attacker of his enemies. May we see so clearly how God shields us from Satan while crushing him under His feet.

Conclusion: David, the "sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Samuel 23:1) is a gift from God to us, providing us with insight into how a "man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22) feels, thinks, and speaks to God, in times of peace and in challenging times.

Therefore David blessed the LORD before all the assembly; and David said: "Blessed are You, LORD God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever. Yours, O LORD, *is* the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all *that is* in heaven and in earth *is Yours*; Yours *is* the kingdom, O LORD, and You are exalted as head over all. Both riches and honor *come* from You, and You reign over all. In Your hand *is* power and might; in Your hand *it is* to make great and to give strength to all. "Now therefore, our God, we thank You and praise Your glorious name. But who *am* I, and who *are* my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly as this? For all things *come* from You, and of Your own we have given You. For we *are* aliens and pilgrims before You, as *were* all our fathers; our days on earth *are* as a shadow, and without hope. (1 Chronicles 29:10-15)

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## Imprecations in the Psalms: Prayers of Cursing

*Justin Dobbs*

**Text:** Psalms 7, 10, 17, 28, 35, 55, 58, 59, 69, 70, 74, 79, 83, 94, 109, 129, 137, 139, 140.

### Introduction:

#### I. Why Study the Imprecations?

- A. Rom 1:21-25 - Man will often exchange truth about God for a lie, ignoring and rejecting what God has revealed about himself, choosing instead to craft a god more fitting to our preferences.
  - 1. We may work from the outside in, wanting what we want, and assuming God will give it or become it. It's a worship of self (Jude 10-11).
  - 2. We may take what God has revealed of himself but emphasize only parts, omitting other parts. We might do this, claiming a respect for God's character or his cause (Num 16:3). We might do this, hoping to avoid less personally desirable aspects of his character (Jon 4:2).
    - a. "God is like a shepherd."
    - b. "God is like a father."
    - c. "God is like a gardener."
- B. Isa 40:18 - We must not commit idolatry, saying, "I know what God is like," and then stick to one idea too much, neglecting others. We'll find ourselves worshipping and serving a god made in our own image rather than the God who made us.
  - 1. We must not think God is like us (Ps 50:21-22).
  - 2. We must know God. We must come to think of him, not make a god of our own thoughts. We will not find him in our own thoughts but in his—the thoughts he has revealed to us in his word (1 Cor 2:9-16). We must guide our hearts to know God. We must let him guide us.

#### II. What are Imprecations?

##### A. Cursing in the Psalms

- 1. Imprecations, anathemas—these are prayers of cursing. Moving beyond a recognition that God destroys the wicked, these prayers call on God to punish them.

2. Imprecatory psalms (psalms that are primarily or characteristically imprecatory) include psalms 7, 10, 17, 28, 35, 55, 58, 59, 69, 70, 74, 79, 83, 94, 109, 129, 137, 139, 140<sup>1</sup>
3. At least forty-two psalms in the psalter contain imprecations.<sup>2</sup>

#### B. Cursing in the Bible

1. concentrated in the psalms - We may not be surprised to find poetry enflamed in anger, poured out to God as prayer.
2. scattered throughout - However, the Bible contains imprecations from beginning to end, often in plainer language.

### Body:

#### I. Objections to Imprecatory Psalms

##### A. "The Old Testament represents a lower morality, and/or a more primitive theology."

1. "Some Christians argue that...the psalmist falls short of the Christian ideal because he lived before the time of Christ. But if this is true, it reflects on the whole book of Psalms and raises the questions, How can we treat any part of the psalms as canonical?" (Longman, 138-139).
2. Response:
  - a. Many beloved "new testament" ideas are first expressed in the Old Testament.
    - 1) Lev 19:17-18 - love your neighbor as yourself (Mt 5:43)
    - 2) Ex 23:4-5 - love your enemies (Mt 5:44; 1 Th 5:15)
  - b. Supposedly "old testament" imprecations are found in the New Testament.
    - 1) Acts 13:10-11 - blinding Bar-Jesus
    - 2) 1 Cor 16:22 - no love for Jesus? *anathema*
    - 3) Gal 1:8-9 - accursed? once more, I say!
    - 4) 1 Tim 1:20 - personal handing over to Satan (for good reason)
    - 5) 2 Tim 4:14 - the Lord will repay what harm he did to me
  - c. "Although the tone of the New Testament is somewhat different from that of the Old Testament, the rejoicing of the righteous at the fall of the wicked is nevertheless not entirely absent from it. The chief example is the joy of the righteous at the fall of mystical Babylon, recorded in Revelation 18 and 19. The text says, 'Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you' (Rev. 18:20). The hosts of heaven actually rejoice that 'the smoke from her goes up for ever and ever' (Rev. 19:3). As far as Jesus himself is concerned, we must remember that the One who

<sup>1</sup> I have labeled these psalms as imprecatory by my own measure. While some psalms contain imprecations, the call for divine vengeance is integral to these. Consult scholarly sources for other lists, though I highly recommend reading through the psalter yourself. You'll find treasures you weren't looking for.

<sup>2</sup> This is my personal count. Scholarly resources vary on this.

said, ‘Father, forgive them,’ also pronounced a terrible catalogue of woes upon the teachers of the law and the Pharisees, recorded in Matthew 23” (Boice, 301).

B. “These imprecations are inspired records of man’s thoughts, not records of man’s inspired thoughts.”

1. “Even more naïvely, almost childishly, 139, in the middles of its hymn of praise throws in (19) ‘Wilt thou not slay the wicked, O God?’—as if it were surprising that such a simple remedy for human ills had not occurred to the Almighty. . . . We must not either try to explain them away or to yield for one moment to the idea that because it comes in the bible, all this vindictive hatred must somehow be good and pious” (Lewis, 142-3).

2. Response:

a. The imprecations are not restricted to the psalms.

1) Num 10:35-36

2) Jer 18:19-23

b. The New Testament makes use of them, e.g. Pss 69 and 79.

1) Acts 1:20

2) Jn 2:17

3) Rom 11:9-10

4) 2 Th 1:7-8

5) Lewis admits this: “One way of dealing with these terrible or (dare we say?) contemptible Psalms is simply to leave them alone. But unfortunately the bad parts will not ‘come away clean’; they may, as we have noticed, be intertwined with the most exquisite things” (143).

c. Granted, we must read thoughtfully and make room for the human element.

1) Job spoke things he ought not to have said (Job 35:1-2; 42:3). He was speaking out of his hurt. He is not justified in his words, but we may understand that what Job was saying wasn’t all of perfect faith. He repented (42:6).

2) David wildly varied in his descriptions, counting himself both sinful from his conception and also praising God from his conception. Poetry turns the volume up on his feelings (Ps 51:5; 71:5-6).

3) Naomi laid her tragedy at God’s feet, saying “the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me” (Ruth 1:20-21). It was true that the Lord had brought calamity upon her, but it wasn’t the whole story. She did not know the end, but she knew God was still in the picture, still ruling over her life. These are human emotions sent heavenward, waiting for a response. This is faith.

C. “These imprecations are prophetic, stating what God will do.”

1. Response:

a. These are requests, not merely prophecies - Ps 35:25-26.

b. Our prayers are to be informed by God’s will - Mt 6:10; 26:39

- c. We are still left with the psalmists' praise of God's warring work, much of which points to the Messiah and the judgment he will bring - Ps 2:9, 12; 18:13-15; 37:7-9.
- d. "The ferocious parts of the Psalms serve as a reminder that there is in the world such a thing as wickedness and that it (if not its perpetrators) is hateful to God" (Lewis, 148). While Ps 5:5 and 11:5 disagree with Lewis—the perpetrators of wickedness are, in fact, hateful to God—the Psalms do remind us that evil really does exist, and God really does intend to destroy it. These kinds of statements will not allow us to grow accustomed to injustice. A paradise dwelling with God will not permit it (Ps 104:35).

## II. Principles from Imprecatory Psalms

### A. God's name and his glory are the primary concern.

#### 1. Pss 28:4-5; 69:6-7

- a. Concern is shown for how people perceive the LORD. Dishonoring God is the backdrop of justice and ought to incite us to anger.
- b. God is not being glorified as is right, and thus people are not finding in him the salvation and peace he so desires to give.
- c. Some speak of the old testament as being sub-new testament, but the new testament fulfills what was there. It doesn't contradict or oppose. As one brother has put it, "In the area of zeal for God's name, our Christianity may be more sub-Christian than David's Judaism."<sup>3</sup>

#### 2. Num 12:3; 14:5; 16:4-5 compared with Ex 32:19-20, 25-27

- a. When the people complained against him, Moses would defer to God's judgment, but Moses would get hot when the people doubted God or rebelled against him.
- b. So, too, our concern must be that God is not blasphemed. When those outside Christ say, "If that's what it means to be a Christian, I don't want any part of it," and it's because of some dishonorable way we've behaved, then we have brought shame on the Lord. God's fury is just.

### B. Curses are never declared as self-enacted vengeance.

- 1. Gen 12:3 - God said he would curse those who curse Abraham (and by effect, his people—Num 22:12). Abraham didn't have to do it himself.
- 2. Mt 5:38; De 19:15-21 - God's law was established to limit and personal vengeance and make it unnecessary. The courts were to give just judgment. And if the courts do not give justice? God is judge (Gen 18:25; De 1:17; 2 Chr 19:4-7).
- 3. We may feel uncomfortable asking the Lord to judge the wicked when we realize we belong in that category. This isn't about my enemies, but God's. That might include me.

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<sup>3</sup> I'm grateful to Sid Latham for his help in much of my thinking about the imprecatory psalms. He made this statement as he was preaching a series on the psalms in Tyngsboro, MA in 2011.

4. “What we retreat from is not the fact that [David] prayed, but the realism in which he couched his prayers. When any measure of hostility disturbs our comfortable lives we rouse ourselves to say ‘Lord, help me to love my enemies as Jesus taught, and, please, will you deal with them for me.’ The psalmist was more realistic: how will God ‘deal with them’ except in ways that he has revealed in his word? False accusers must receive what they purposed to achieve (Dt. 19:16–19, cf. 2 with 6); those who disobey have no tenure on earth (Dt. 4:1, cf. 8); sinners bring disaster on their descendants (Ex. 34:7, cf. 9–12). If we retreat into unreality with a general petition where the psalmist ventured to express scriptural realism, we should at least be aware of what we are doing. But our retreat is understandable and accords with Paul’s caution (Eph. 4:26) that allowable anger is near neighbor to sin. J. L. McKenzie (*American Ecclesiastical Review*, III, 1944, pp. 81–96) asks whether ‘the imprecatory psalms are not a model, not because of their lower degree of perfection but because they are too lofty for . . . us to imitate without danger’” (Motyer as cited in Keller, 375).

C. Some of the curses are prayers that God would take away the power to do harm.

1. Ps 10:15 - Break the arm of the wicked so they can do no more harm.
2. Ps 58:6 - Break the teeth and tear out the fangs to make their threats empty.

D. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

1. Ezk 18:30-32 - God would rather forgive the repentant.
2. Ps 7:12; 52:7 - This same theme is found in the psalms. God wants the evildoer to turn and find refuge in him. If not, judgment will certainly come.

E. The prayers of cursing exercise righteous indignation and redemptive concern.

1. Acts 4:24-31; Ps 2:1-2 - The disciples anticipated injustice, partly because of Jesus’ warning, but also because of the psalms (Mt 10:25). Man’s wicked rebellion could not thwart God’s plans to bring reconciliation through the Christ (Acts 4:27-28).
2. This pattern becomes instructive to us who suffer. “God, look out for us. Look to their violence against us. We’ll keep working, proclaiming the kingdom of the Son, for nothing can stand in your way.”

F. God’s judgment is hope for the righteous.

1. Ps 6:8-10; 60:11-12 - If God won’t fight for us, our hope is lost.
2. 2 Th 1:4-12 - This is true of the new testament, as well.

G. Trusting in God’s judgment frees us to love.

1. Ps 3; 59:8-13 - Some of David’s “harshes” prayers stand in contrast to his gentlest moments. He loved his son, Abasalom, yet he prayed this against him! He spared Saul’s life; how can he talk about him this way in prayer? In truth, it is his prayer that surrenders his cause to God so that he can be obedient to God and love his enemy.
2. Rom 12:17-13:2 - This Christ-like love is informed and supported by the knowledge that God avenges.

### III.

#### A Sample Imprecatory Psalm

A. Ps 109:1-5

1. David is surrounded by enemies who tear at him with their words (vv. 2-3). The context of the psalm demands a court of law (6-7). This is not mere slander or gossip.
2. The imprecatory prayer goes to the God David praises (v. 1). David doesn't come to God only when he has an enemy to smite. God is regularly magnified in the heart and on the lips of this petitioner. David has a relationship of reverence with the LORD.
3. David's suffering is contrary to his own behavior. He has given love. They returned hatred. "They reward me evil for good" (v. 5). In practicing the "golden rule," David commits to love and asks the Judge to make it right.

#### B. Ps 109:6-15

1. "They" shifts to "he" as a leader of the accusers stands out to David. We see Judas here, leading the mob to Jesus, but David must have faced something similar. So might we. Ultimately, the enemy leading all other adversaries is Satan, and he will be found guilty.
2. Verses 6-15 flow in a chiasmus, centering on the removal of his possessions and the destruction of his family. Why such rage? The next verses suggest an answer that fits with David's plea for justice.

#### C. Ps 109:16-20

1. David loved these men. But this ring leader? He showed no one kindness, pursuing "the poor and needy and the brokenhearted" (v. 16). He did not love, but God will show steadfast love by dashing the plans of the wicked and saving the lowly (vv. 21, 26).
2. Thus the destruction of this man and those he loves is what he has coming to him.

#### D. Ps 109:21-25

1. God is Lord, the God over all, and he will give justice.
2. God is shown to be a God of love, caring for his suffering people. David, for all his passionate praying, is vulnerable to these wicked people (vv. 22-24).

#### E. Ps 109:26-31

1. What David wants is the praise that God will get for being who God is (vv. 30-31).
2. And who is it who stands at the right hand of the needy one, the accused (v. 31)? When the adversaries slung their lies, the Lord stood near. We, too, pray for such a God who is near, and we have him. This imprecatory prayer finds its beautiful fulfillment in the Messiah who both suffered such wrongs and stands to defend his people against them.

### **Conclusion:**

The imprecatory psalms show us a God who loves justice. They teach his people to love it and hope in his achievement of it. In God's wrath we see our deserved punishment for sin and God's love for us, fulfilled at the cross of Christ. God hates sin, and he has provided a Mediator who stands on the mount when God's anger burns hot, a new Moses who offers a better freedom and a perfect reconciliation (Ex 32:10; Heb 12:18-24). Imprecatory prayers are not then nullified by the cross—they are amplified. In Jesus' suffering death and victorious resurrection to the throne, we see God dealing with evil and his assurance to deal with evil. Imprecatory prayers must be prayed by a people of integrity hoping in a just God, to whom belong power and steadfast love, who "will render to a man according to his work" (Ps 62:11-12).

### **Psalms to Consider:**

The psalter must be taken as a whole. When we haven't taken in the fullness of the picture God reveals of himself, we will find ourselves struggling with an isolated passage that seems contrary to what we think we know of him. Worse still, we may develop a picture of God that is not the LORD but a god of our own making. The imprecations of the psalmists are consistent with the view of the God that the psalter—and the Spirit—invites us to know. In working through the Psalms, I have found these particularly helpful in shaping my appreciation and understanding of the imprecations and therefore precious in my relationship with the God I worship. The whole of this collection and analysis, clumsy as it is, ought not be expressed in a lecture. I hope this “curation” of psalms will be helpful to you, nonetheless. The “spiky bits” of the imprecations get rounded out when we see them in their proper setting. Quotations are from the ESV.

Key: **imprecatory**; *recognition or exaltation of God's power, justice, or warrior work*; overtly messianic

- *1:4-6* - The wicked, like the chaff, will perish. They will not stand in judgment.
- *2:4-5, 9, 11-12* - The Lord will judge. He wishes us to be wise, to serve him and rejoice in him, and he offers us the blessing of a refuge. To refuse him is to kindle his wrath. Note that this psalm is used to instruct and comfort the disciples in Acts 4:25-26.
- *3:7* - This is the first call on God to deliver from the wicked. If it is an imprecation, it is a soft one, for David calls on God to save him, knowing what it will look like: “For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked.” Remember, his enemy is his own son (2 Sam 18:32-33).
- *5:4-6, 10* - God, who is righteous and eternal, will not suffer evil to dwell with him. There must, then, be an end to evil—the deeds, as well as the people who do them (v. 5; note 11:5). It is fitting that their own wicked “wisdom” will be their undoing.
- *6:10* - This is an implied imprecation, though not a direct one (v. 9). David's hope is in God's justice.
- *7:3-5, 6, 9 11-16* - A startling prayer! David asks God to curse him if he has committed any wrong. It is a commitment to justice, reflecting the blessings and curses of Gerizim and Ebal (De 27-28). Verse 6 is naked imprecation. Verses 11-16 reveal that God's justice may at times look circumstantial: the wicked falling into the pit he dug himself is the result of God whetting his sword and bending his bow against the unrepentant. Because he is a righteous God, his indignation is an everyday occurrence (v. 11).
- *8:2* - Enemies are silenced (even ended), and “little ones” hold the position of strength when God is glorified. This is the point. Jesus must be praised. His enemies will be put down (Mt 21:16; Lk 19:40).
- *9:19-20* - This is one of the softer imprecations. Judgment, fear, humiliation—David doesn't call for violence outright, but it is suggested. Why does he want it? God cares for the afflicted (v. 12). The oppressed cry for justice, and the One who can give it is a stronghold to those who seek him (vv. 9-10).
- *10:2, 12-15* - Once again God is called upon to “arise.” This time, the prayer is more plain: “lift up your hand...break the arm of the wicked and evildoer...” The reason? He believes God has forgotten him (v. 11). The helpless need help (v. 14). God's wrath validates his character and his love.
- *11:5-6* - Is there plainer language? The LORD “hates the wicked.” We may think to separate the sin from the sinner, saying that God loves sinners but hates the sin. Perhaps we should say that God hates the sinner and loves him so much that he would spend his righteous wrath on his own son to destroy the sin rather than destroy the sinner with the sin. It's more of a mouthful, but God's love for his enemies is not a simple thing (Jn 3:16; Rom 5:6-11). We need a God-sized picture of love, and that picture comes complete with a God-sized picture of hate (Ps 97:10; Rom 12:9).

- **12:3-4** - Different translations may render this an indicative. The 1901 ASV has v. 3 as “Jehovah will cut off...,” but the verb form is a jussive. David is calling on God to put an end to the tongues that boast. “None of this talk, unfortunately, is mere hot air. It can have considerable effects. Verse 5 is in no doubt that it leads to ‘the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy,’ and superhuman power is necessary to protect us from it” (Wilcock, 49). Here, too, we see a theme that will be present again and again with God’s justice and the imprecations that call for his action—the humiliation of the self-exalting and the lifting up of the lowly (v. 5).
- **17:13** - “Arise, O LORD!” It has become a repeated cry in this first book of the psalter. Deliverance means slaying the wicked, and surely the Lord does not bear his sword in vain (Rom 13:14). In contrast, David claims to have kept himself from sin. God has tested him and found nothing (vv. 3-5). A prayer for justice cannot be safely prayed without the personal commitment to integrity. For God, this justice is a personal thing. So it must be with those who seek vindication from his presence (v. 2).
- **18:6, 47** - So much of this psalm celebrates and finds comfort in God’s deliverance. The Savior is pictured as a mighty warrior in epically, monstrous proportions (vv. 7-15). The result? Praise for God and for the messiah (Rom 15:9).
- **21:8-13** - While not imprecatory, the psalm assumes God’s loving protection from enemies. There is comfort here, and celebration, too, of God’s warrior-like strength: “Be exalted, O Lord, in your strength! We will sing and praise your power.” Such worship is the result of those who have seen God aim his bows at the enemies faces (v. 12). His appearance spells doom; his wrath is complete (vv. 8-9).
- **23:4** - We find comfort in the God who bears the rod and staff while the enemies are so near (v. 5). Lewis finds fault here with David: “The poet’s enjoyment of his present prosperity would not be complete unless [the enemies] were watching it all and hating it. ...the pettiness and vulgarity of it, especially in such surroundings, are hard to endure” (142-143). Maybe we overlook that David’s surroundings were not veritable “green pastures,” but rather—at least at times—“the valley of the shadow of death” (vv. 2, 4). David proclaims that God’s comforts are not restricted to favorable circumstances, nor must the enemies stand by watching. David has invited his enemies to his table before, and perhaps God’s goodness on display like this will get them there (2 Sam 9; Rom 11:11).
- **25:2-3, 8-9, 11-14, 19-21** - “Let me not be put to shame” is the prayer of the one who knows that God will make them “ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.” David is counting on a God personally concerned with justice. Yet here David knows what he deserves (vv. 6-7). He is hoping for God’s mercy and faithful love, as well as his counsel (v. 8). There is some transparency here that helps us as we measure the wicked in the rest of the psalter. David knows he is not altogether righteous—though we might think otherwise from his words just one page over in Ps 26. David knows it is the humble sinner that God leads (v. 9). The enemies, then, must be the arrogant who will not follow. They do not come into his counsel; they are too busy exulting over others to bring themselves low before the God who would show them lasting favor (vv. 14, 2). God is not eager to destroy. He would rather forgive. He would rather teach. Not everyone will be taught.
- **26:5, 9-10** - David hates? We should not be shocked that a man after God’s own heart hates what God hates (5:5). A man of integrity will feel passionately about the plans and actions of evil men. While David does not pray against them here, surely his attitude toward wicked men will inform his prayers. He knows their end; he may well pray God’s will be done (vv. 9-10; 1:4-6).
- **27:2, 6** - Is it not enough that David’s head be lifted up? Must his head be lifted up above his enemies (v. 6)? David wants only to enjoy the glory of God as he praises him in his house forever (v. 4). If that is where he will be, then where in relation to David—in relation to God!—must the wicked be? David’s confidence in his God is confidence that justice will be done (vv. 13-14).

- **28:3-5** - The impassioned plea for justice is God-centered: destruction will come to the wicked, because the wicked reject God. Would we expect those who deny the Life-giver to long enjoy life?
- **30:1** - Healing and rescue, deliverance and salvation imply defeating the enemy. We cannot have one without the other.
- **31:3-4, 6, 15, 17-18** - The manuscripts differ somewhat on whether it is David or God who hates the idolaters in v. 6, but neither result should surprise us (Lev 26:30; De 7:26). If the lies—their object of worship, as well as their speech—must stop, then the wicked themselves must cease (vv. 17-18). Falsehood goes deeper than we might think, and the solution must be more drastic than we thought. Will not the father of lies himself be silenced one day? No more will he speak against the righteous, and in this judgment the righteous find comfort.
- **34:12-16, 21** - Verse 20 is taken up in Jn 19:36. Our hope in the vindication of our Lord in his death, burial, and resurrection, the warning and promise that the wicked will be slain—the whole stanza seems messianic. Perhaps we should think of Ps 2:12 here, too. We cannot strip away the judgment of a righteous God and leave the cross untouched. And there is instruction for us after the cross: vv. 12-16 find their place in Peter's letter telling the saints not to "repay evil for evil...but on the contrary, bless... (1 Pet 3:8-12). What fuels such selfless love? God's justice (1 Pet 3:12).
- **35:1-10, 23-24, 26, 27-8** - The imprecations are strong and plain here. It is a personal matter for David, though he has holy concerns (vv. 7-8, 11-14). God's judgment is a cause for rejoicing in God's salvation. The result of David's rescue is that God's righteousness is put on display (v. 24), and others loyal to the Lord and his king will also have reason to praise God with David (vv. 27-28).
- **37:8-9, 11-13, 14-15, 16-17, 20, 34, 40** - These are but a smattering of verses in a psalm wholly given to the comfort that comes to the righteous when God destroys the wicked. Those who worry over wrongdoing are counseled to keep from wrath themselves (v. 8). They will see God himself act with perfect judgment (v. 34). The psalm gives words to the feelings of the betrayed, the belittled, and the beaten and promises that the wicked will not forever "get away with it," something the oppressed want to know.
- **38:12-15** - David has felt God's anger himself. He wants no more of it (vv. 1-8). It was because of his own sin that God was angry (v. 3). But now others are seeking David's hurt, and it is not for his good as God's anger was (vv. 12-14). Similar to Ps 37, David will wait for the Lord to answer his enemies. Trust in God's just response keeps David from a sinful response.
- **40:13-15** - Verses 6-8 speak of the heart of our Lord (Heb 10:5-7). Verses 13-15 is certainly imprecatory, and it comes from the mouth of our Savior. We can hear v. 15 in Mk 15:29. Perhaps we should hear v. 14 in Heb 10:29-31.
- **41:8-10** - This is prophecy, surely, but not merely prophetic. It is a prayer. A request. Will not the risen Lord repay the wicked? Note De 32:39-42; Mt 25:31-46; Jn 5:26-29.
- **43:1** - If the cause of the righteous will be sustained, then the wicked must be defeated.
- **44:1-3, 5-6, 26** - The motives are clear here: glory to God, greater faith in God, and proof of his love.
- **45:3-5** - The king is praised at his wedding (vv. 2, 10-17). In the context of such a celebration, he is called upon to ride out victoriously against the enemy (vv. 3-5). Heb 1:8-9 points us to Jesus. Thus we are presented with a groom who will celebrate his marriage to his bride even as he fights for "truth and meekness and righteousness." He hates evil, even as he loves his bride (v. 7). See Rev 18-21.

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- 46:5-11 - God's destruction of the wicked "makes wars to cease" (v. 9).
  - 47:2-3, 5, 9 - The psalms give us many reasons to praise our God. We cannot miss this one. He is "to be feared, a great king over all the earth," and as such, he is the Warrior who subdues the people (vv. 2-3).
  - 48 - God wants his people to think of him as a fortress, to count the towers of their citadel. The panic and trembling of the enemy gives us cause to worship God (Ja 2:19). If this is part of the portrait God gives us of himself, then wouldn't it be strange to think that he would not want us to pray that he fight against the wicked?
  - 52:5-6 - This psalm is useful for a number of reasons in considering the imprecations within the psalms. It gives us a closer look at the wicked. He boasts in his evil, speaks of evil plans, and works at deceit (vv. 1-2). He loves evil, he loves lying, and he loves the harm that words can do (vv. 3-4). He could have taken refuge in the LORD but refused (v. 7). Additionally, this psalm helps us see the result of the destruction of the wicked. "The righteous shall see and fear" (v. 6). If the wicked will not repent, their doom is a warning to others to turn to God.
  - 53:5 - Does it really matter that the psalmist isn't asking God to do violence against the wicked here? God does it anyway. To pray that God would do as he wills is to align our will with his. To avoid such prayers says more about us than about him. We cannot afford to ignore God's violent rejection of evil lest we begin to sympathize with it.
  - 54:5, 7 - So often David connects his "cursing" with God's name. This is a matter of God being God, of God being true to who he is: "in your faithfulness put an end to them."
  - 55:9, 15, 23 - David sees the widespread casualties of sin (v. 9). To have pity on the oppressed is to make the wicked cease (vv. 10-11). The grave is the place for the wicked. Verse 22 is used to comfort the humble in 1 Peter 5:6-7. The spiritual balm of this verse is the more potent for its context.
  - 56:7 - It is a jarring juxtaposition that v. 8 follows: "You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?" Sweet succor! Followed by "Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call. This I know, that God is for me" (v. 9). God comforts his people with the justice of his wrath. His judgment of the wicked is in the process of wiping away every tear (Rev 21:4).
  - 57:1-3 - The parallel structure here suggests that God's salvation and his faithful love are bound together with his putting the oppressors to shame.
  - 58:6-11 - This feverish imprecation is a response to the injustice of those who should be giving justice in the earth (vv. 1-2). We have seen in our own generation judges who punish the innocent and protect the guilty. Even so, will "the righteous rejoice"? Will he "bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked" (v. 10)? To bathe the feet is to rest from the work of the day or to arrive at the end of the journey. Might we see here a connection between unrest and injustice, and therefore rest and righteous wrath?
  - 59:8-13 - Three of David's psalms and one of Asaph's (75) are "according to Do Not Destroy." Each speaks of God's judgment on the wicked. If the righteous will survive, it is God who must rescue them. The concern here is instruction—that the people not forget (v. 11) and the wicked know that God rules to the ends of the earth (v. 13).
  - 60:6-12 - The imprecation is implied in v. 11 within its context, but it isn't as strong as Pss 58 and 59. Our hope is only in the God who fights for us.
  - 63:9-11 - David is comforted knowing that those who would destroy him will themselves be destroyed.
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- 64:7-10 - God's judgment has as its concerns God's glory and his redemptive purposes (v. 9).
  - 65:5-8 - This might be a mere showing of strength but for the mention of stilling "the tumult of the peoples" (v. 7). How does he do this? Does he make wars to cease? Does he silence the nations with the manifestation of his terrible power? It's a line worth our meditation.
  - 66:3-4 - The psalmist praises God for his awesome might. How awesome? So awesome that his "enemies come cringing." It is one of the reasons "all the earth worships" God.
  - 67:1-5 - It's subtle, but the whole earth awaits God's judgment. All the nations should know his saving power, and in particular, his equitable judgment (vv. 2-4). Wicked are found the world over, and so, too, are the victims of the evil deeds.
  - 68:1-3, 5, 20-23, 27, 28-31 - The whole of the psalm sings triumphantly that God scatters, drives away, melts, and marches against his enemies, the enemies of his people. Eph 4:8 celebrates this as God's grace. He is the "father of the fatherless and protector of widows" (v. 5). He lifts up the lowly—note Benjamin's prominence (v. 27). Verses 28-31 call on God to act in his power so that the nations reach out toward him (Acts 17:27).
  - 69:22-28 - If we tend to sweep away imprecations in the psalms as something belonging to an old testament frame of mind or otherwise the product of a heart full of hatred, this psalm causes us some great difficulty. Is it prophetic? Certainly (Jn 2:17; 15:25; 19:28-29). But the apostles also found it doctrinally instructive (Rom 11:9-10) and relevant in application (Acts 1:20; Rom 15:2-3). So must we.
  - 70:2 - Surely David isn't "poor and needy" (v. 5)? Maybe this is for others to pray and sing, for the actual powerless and helpless. If so, then David helps them by giving words to their cause, a course for them to take to God, their helper. Or maybe David, humbler than we might expect a king to be, really does see himself in need of God's help.
  - 71:13 - David doesn't seek to destroy his enemies himself. He asks God to give him justice. The result? Continual joy and praise of God's "righteous help" (vv. 23-24).
  - 72:9 - When v. 9 is put in context, we might appreciate the need for violent intervention. The king defends the poor, makes righteousness and peace abundant, and considers the lives of the needy to be precious (vv. 4, 7, 12-14). Verse 17 puts all this on shoulders too broad for any but the Messiah. Is it a prayer of cursing? Certainly, especially if the king, "the royal son" is the Lord (v. 1).
  - 73:27 - Asaph takes comfort in the God who ends the lives of faithless people. God's imminent judgment helps us cope with the injustice we see everywhere around us.
  - 74:1, 10-11, 18, 22-23 - The ultimate aim of such imprecations is the veneration of God's holy name. The crimes of the wicked against God and against the worship of God cannot be overlooked (vv. 4-8).
  - 75:6-10 - God's wondrous deeds include pouring out his cup of wrath (vv. 1, 8). Is there something here that points to Jesus in the garden? God makes the scales of justice balance, and Jesus drinking of the cup brings justice (Jn 18:11). We ought not see this as merely prophetic, though. Jesus' crucifixion was in step with a just God. The cross would not be necessary if God were not going to punish sin.
  - 76 - Should we praise God for his wrath? This psalm does. Verse 10 is difficult. "The wrath of man" might be wrath *against* men. It might be that righteously wrathful men praise a righteously wrathful God. Perhaps it is a people angry against God, and when God defeats them, he wears their wrath as a war trophy. This interpretation fits with what we see of God's warring with the nations in other passages, e.g. Egypt in Ex 14:1-4.
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- 78:1-2, 21, 30-31, 34, 38, 41-51, 59, 66 - According to Mt 13:35, these are Jesus' words, and they are instructive (v. 42). Through them we await a shepherd (vv. 70-72). The words are a memorial of God's precious care for his people, a care incomplete without his anger, jealousy, and victory over the enemy.
- **79** - Asaph's first concern is for God's honor: "your inheritance...your holy temple...your servants...your faithful" (vv. 1-2). He recognizes God's righteous anger against his people even as he prays for God's righteous anger against the nations. A prayer of cursing must be a humble, honest prayer. The whole psalm is incredibly God-centered.
- 80:2, 4-6, **16**, 17 - God is mighty to save, mightier than the enemy, and he makes strong the son of man to give life to those who call upon his name (vv. 17-18).
- 81:14-15 - The LORD wants to be known to his people as the one who will subdue their enemies.
- **82:7-8** - If the earth is to be a fit inheritance for the LORD, it must be cleansed of injustice.
- **83** - The whole psalm is a curse, but a redemptive one that glorifies the Most High (vv. 16-18). Either the nations will be ashamed and seek the name of the LORD, or they will perish in disgrace.
- 85:2-5 - Wrath. Indignation. Fury. God gets angry, but he gets angry over sin. And yet he forgives. We cannot appreciate vv. 10-11—"righteousness and peace kiss each other"—without knowing his anger. And how will God make a way (v. 13)? Only when righteousness is restored. How can God cover all sin if his righteous wrath remains unspent (vv. 2-3)? Of course, Jesus is the answer. The gospel is here.
- **86:14-17** - Maybe it is only a soft imprecation, but at it's core is the knowledge of the Lord who is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (v. 15). David sees no problem asking the God of grace to put to shame the oppressor.
- 88:7, 16, 18 - There is no prayer of cursing here, but the psalmist feels cursed by God. God's wrath lies heavy upon him, overwhelming him (v. 7). Verses 8-12 seem to ask questions that only the cross and the resurrection can answer. God's wrath and his love, the mystery of his grace—it is a complete package.
- 89:7-8, 10, 23-24, 32, 38ff - Similar things are expounded here: God's wrath and mercy, his promise to destroy and to deliver—all for the sake of his name (vv. 23-24). But vv. 38 to the end raise a problem for the psalmist: God has cast off his anointed. Will he not keep his promise to David? The cross is close at hand, here. This psalm is historical in its exposition of the fall of the kingdom of Judah, but it points to more, and God's righteous wrath has its place in the fulfillment of it all.
- 90:7-8, 9, 11, 14 - We are all deserving of God's wrath, as our short years attest (v. 9). God's anger isn't arbitrary. It is righteous. Yet, he will give his love like manna to his servants (v. 14).
- 91:8, **14-15** - What do lovers of God cry out for? How will he answer? Verse 15 tells us. So does v. 8.
- 92:5-9, 11 - If we do not know that God destroys the wicked, then we are fools. God is righteous, and he saves his people that we might see his judgment and declare him upright (vv. 11, 15).
- **94:1-7** - God's wrath is never undeserved (v. 2). It fits the crime and instructs the foolish (vv. 23, 8-15).
- 95:10-11 - The book of Hebrews brings us here to warn us. God's wrath is not unique to the Old Testament. It is something we must remember. He is a consuming fire (Heb 12:29; De 4:24; 2 Th 1:8).
- 96:9-13 - To the saved, God's judgments are a reason to rejoice, with 96:10 so very much like 67:4.

- 97:3, 10 - The LORD is capable of a great show of force, but he never flaunts his power for his own amusement. He is preserving his holy ones, delivering them from the wicked. This salvation is not limited to the Jews, for the earth is called upon to rejoice. “Let the many coastlands be glad!” (v. 1).
- 98 - All the earth is called to witness God’s judgment. It is a *good* thing, for all the earth is in need of the justice he gives.
- 99 - Three times God is said to be holy in this psalm (vv. 3, 5, and 9). He is to be known as the King who loves and executes justice (v. 4). He forgives, but he is not a partial judge. He avenges the wrongs that even his own people commit (v. 8). We are called to holiness if we would worship at his holy mountain. God’s judgment is a much needed reminder: personal righteousness is important to God.
- 101:5, 7, 8 - This is a distinct psalm, for it is the expression of a king, an earthly authority tasked with preserving justice in the land. His commitment is to personal integrity (v. 4), but his commitment extends to all in his jurisdiction (v. 8), even in his own house (v. 7). His concern is not behavior only, but matters of the heart (v. 5). Such a thorough response to evil comes from a man who worships a loving God (v. 1) and wants him near (v. 2). Surely, we each in our own spheres of authority see some application to be made from this psalm.
- 102:1-2, 12-17 - Perhaps there is no curse here, but it is nearly: “Nations will fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth will fear your glory” (v. 15). Such is the godly prayer of the afflicted (v. 17). Remember that vv. 25-27 get us to Jesus in Heb 1:10-12. The Christ will answer such a prayer.
- 103:3, 6-11 - Here is a God who will not be angry forever, but he *does* get angry. What is it that he is wanting from us? Reverence (vv. 13, 17). Faithful love (v. 18).
- **104:35** - The whole thing is beautiful. We might ask, “Why didn’t he just stop at v. 34?” But perhaps that is the problem. Without v. 35 what would vv. 1-34 be? Sinners would still prevail. The wicked will still be permitted their share in the earth. It is sin that causes problems in paradise, not its removal.
- 105:26-38 - We must not forget that Israel was saved through Egypt’s destruction, a much celebrated history throughout the Bible. Can we see something of Php 1:28 in v. 38?
- 106:6-13 - If God saves us by defeating the enemy, surely we would learn to fear him ourselves. Yes?
- 107:39-43 - Be wise. Attend to these things. It is God’s love, and we must learn to be glad of it.
- 108:7-13 - This psalm is a reharmonization of Ps 57:7-11 and 60:5-12. Themes in both lead us to trust in the God who fights the battles for his people (v. 13).
- **109** - Probably the most thoroughly imprecatory, but the psalm is once again found to look to the coming Messiah (Mt 27:39), as well instructive to Jesus’ disciples (Acts 1:20). The retribution is another example of *lex talionis*, a justice taught in both the Old and New Testaments (Rom 2:6; Jn 5:29; 2 Cor 5:29). Just one example of such retribution: the offender rejected covenantal love for the poor and needy (v. 16), and thus his children will be made fatherless, with none to love them (v. 12). That love shows back up in vv. 21 and 26 as David knows that while his accuser(s) attack him in response to his love (vv. 3-4), God will stand by him to save him from death (v. 31).
- 110:2, 5-6 - It’s a favorite of the New Testament writers, so its message must be close to the heart of God’s Spirit. The Lord’s reign will not wait for the enemies’ surrender, and it will one day mean a complete judgment the world over.

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- *112:10* - Praise the Lord! So says verse 1, and one reason we praise him is because the wicked and his purposes will fail.
  - *115:4-8, 17* - We might overlook the fate of idolaters in vv. 4-8 if it weren't for v. 17.
  - *118:7* - It is the follow up comfort to the truth of v. 6, quoted in Heb 13:6. Judgment of the wicked is the hope of the faithful.
  - **119** - The heart of the psalmist has been pressed into the shape of God's testimonies. His feelings toward the wicked have been instructed by God. He acknowledges that God rebukes those who stray from the law (v. 21), and his anger is aroused by their treachery against God (v. 53). The psalmist's love of the truth conditions his hatred of falsehood (vv. 113, 163), and so we see things peak in v. 126: "It is time for the LORD to act, for your law has been broken." His request is in line with God's judgments. He cannot remain cold when faithless people choose to forget God's words (vv. 139, 158). Note imprecations in vv. 78, 84, 126, as well as in the tone of vv. 145-152.
  - **120** - The psalm recounts a prayer (v. 1). Peace was sought out, but there are some who want the fight. The psalmist is free to seek peace because he knows what God will do (vv. 3-4).
  - *125:3-5* - If it is imprecatory, it is of the milder kind, but the hope for peace hinges on God's judgment.
  - **129:4-8** - What begins with a truth statement about the LORD's righteousness and the fate of the wicked continues into a prayer that God's will be done.
  - *132:18* - The song concludes a beautiful promise from God with his commitment to clothe David's enemies enemies with shame. The whole of it looks to the future, surely to the Messiah.
  - *135:6, 8-12, 13-14* - The Lord does what he pleases, including the ruination of his people's enemies (vv. 8-12). This vindication brings him glory, and it calls others who would fear him (vv. 13-14, 20).
  - *136:10, 15, 17-22* - We are reminded—forced to see it by hypnotic repetition—that God's enduring love looks like judgment and war and victory.
  - **137:7-9** - It is meant to comfort, though it hurts to read. However, this is a courtroom scene, and the Lord is on his throne. He has said he would deal with Babylon (Jer 51:54-56), and such terrible judgment is "eye for an eye." What's more, we look ahead to Rev 18:20 and the joy of heaven when Babylon's smoke goes up forever. Though I think Lewis misses the primary message of God's vindication of his people, he offers some helpful personal application here. "We know the proper object of utter hostility—wickedness, especially our own. ...I know things in the inner world which are like babies; the infantile beginning of small indulgences, small resentments, which may one day become dipsomania or settled hatred, but which woo us and wheedle us with special pleadings and seem so tiny, so helpless that in resisting them we feel we are being cruel to animals. They begin whimpering to us 'I don't ask much, but,' or 'I had at least hoped,' or 'you owe yourself *some* consideration.' Against all such pretty infants (the dears have such winning ways( the advice of the Psalm is best. Knock the little bastards' brains out. And 'blessed' he who can, for it's easier said than done" (200).
  - *138:7* - The good Lord fights for me, to fulfill his purpose for me (v. 8).
  - **139:19-22** - Up until v. 19, the psalmist expresses wonder that God knows him thoroughly. But then vv. 19-22 shifts into hate-filled imprecations. Still, vv. 23-24 pleads with God to know and try his thoughts. Perhaps these thoughts in vv. 19-22 would be counted as "any grievous way," and the psalmist is laying bare his inner being that God might cleanse it. Or could it be that the thoughts of vv. 19-22 are not contrary to the purity the psalmist hopes to have but necessary to it? Does God call upon
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the righteous to love good and hate evil? Is this a personal offense, or the psalmist concerned with God's glory? It seems we should be offended along with the psalmist rather than be offended at him.

- **140:9-11** - David is hemmed in by violent, evil men, and he pleads with God to deal with them. The psalm is a chiasm. Verse 9 corresponds to 7, 10 to 5, with the conclusion that “the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and will execute justice for the needy” (12). He fights for the rights of the helpless. Judgment of the wicked is the relief of the weak. God *will* do away with the wicked, and a prayer like this trusts him to do it and hastens the day. There really are wicked men who intend to do harm to others, but then v. 3 quoted in Rom 3:13 reminds us that we have participated with such evil plans. We are justly deserving of such retribution, and we are all in need of grace. But if man will not seek God's grace, then what? Can there be any other result than God's judgment? And there are many men who will not seek God's grace. May we humble ourselves to recognize our need.
- **141:5-7** - Verses 5-7 are difficult. David in v. 5 claims continual prayer against evil deeds, yet recognizes a kindness in being struck himself by the righteous (see Pr 27:6). Here is the difference between the wicked and the righteous: the righteous will turn when reprov'd. The wicked resist and continue until they are broken by God's justice.
- **142** - This seems to be at the start of David's flight from Saul. It fits with Ps 57 and 1 Sam 22. There are no imprecations here, and perhaps this is what we imagine most righteous prayers look like for the oppressed, but it won't always be this way. See Ps 143.
- **143:12** - It's a beautiful psalm, and we might have no objection to it, until we come to v. 12. “But the facts remain, and the psalm ends with a note of realism. His situation will not finally be put right till the enemy is dealt with. Covenant love, which is tough, not soft, will do this also” (Wilcock, 269).
- **144:1-2, 5-8** - It is God who does the fighting, too. Verse 11 exposes a part of what is at stake—a right of hand of falsehood suggests idolatry (Isa 44:20). David's battle is for God's glory, not his own. And if God wins, then the idols are shown to be nothing, and more would turn to the true God. That is the hope with such imprecations.
- **145:20** - As always, the context helps us here. Among other ideas is this: if God's kingdom is to be complete and eternal, what place would the wicked have in it (v. 13)? We must become as Jesus said, seeking first God's kingdom and his righteousness (Mt 6:33).
- **146:7** - Verse 6 is used to restrain the crowds from worshipping Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:15). The following verses of the psalm assure Paul and his companions—and all who would live as sojourners in this world—that the LORD in whom they hope will protect them and provide for them.
- **147:6** - This is who the LORD is, abundant in power, with immeasurable understanding (v. 5).
- **149:6-9** - Far from toning down this psalm, the New Testament supports it with warlike language in Eph 6:10ff and 2 Cor 10:3-5. In some way—still a mystery—the saints will stand with Christ at the judgment and participate in his victory (Rev 19:14). Until then, the conflict is all around us—and certainly in us—and we must not yield for a moment. The battle must be fought, and the song renewed that praises the Lord in the assembly of the godly (Ps 149:1).

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## Royal Psalms

*Tommy Peeler*

**Text:** Psalms 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132, 144

**Introduction: Royal Psalms emphasize the human king**

- I. Kings promised Gen 17:6, 16; 35:11; Deut 28:36
- II. They are given to Judah Genesis 49: 10 and Numbers 24:17
- III. Deut 17:14-20 gives regulations for the king
- IV. Words and ideas which link the royal psalms: the king, the anointed one, refer to David by name
- V. God's promises to David in II Samuel 7 and I Chronicles 17 are central to the idea of the royal psalms

**Body:**

- I. Psalm 132
  - A. II Samuel 5-7 serve as background for the Psalm: David captures Jerusalem, he moves the ark, and he desires to build a temple for the ark
  - B. Two oaths:
    1. Verse 2, David's oath to build a house for Lord
    2. Lord's oath to put a descendent on the throne
  - C. Key terms:
    1. LORD- 1, 11
    2. David- 1, 10, 11, 17
    3. swore- 2, 11
    4. resting place- 8, 14
    5. clothing of priests and godly ones- 9, 16
  - D. 132:1-5
    1. David vows to build a temple for ark
    2. 3-4 hyperbole
  - E. 132:6-9
    1. Wanderings ark- only mention of it in Psalms
  - F. 132:10-12

1. God's vow to David to sit one of his descendants on the throne- Acts 2:30
- G. 132:13-18
1. God establishes His presence in Zion
  2. The LORD choice of Zion (13) is connected with the choice of David- Psalm 78:67-72

## II. Psalm 45

- A. 45:1-2 Opening Praise to the king
- B. 45:3-7 The military power and character of the king
1. He is the best looking- 2 and the strongest among men- 3-5
  2. Why does he fight? 4 He fights for the most noble of causes
  3. Verses 6-7 are quoted of Jesus in Hebrews 1:8-9
  4. The king is the ideal man
- C. 45:8-9 King prepares for wedding
1. Notice the emphasis on smells, sounds, and sights
  2. The song "Out of the ivory palaces" (8) is based on this psalm and the Messianic interpretation
  3. Ivory- I Kings 10:18; 22:39; Amos 3:15; 6:4
  4. Ophir- I Kings 10:11; 22:48; Job 22:24; 28:16
- D. 45:10-15 Focus on the bride
- E. 45:16-17 Final blessings on the king

## III. Psalm 2

- A. 2:1-3 The nations plot rebellion to the LORD
1. Verse 2, kings and rulers- most powerful combined their power to oppose God's anointed
  2. Verse 3, They view service to God as oppressive and slavery and long to break free
- B. 2:4-6 The LORD rules in the heavens
1. Verse 4, LORD laughs- 37:13; 59:8
  2. Verse 6, All opposition does not stop God from appointing His king
- C. 2:7-9 God's decree, "You are my son..."
1. Verse 7, You are My Son- II Sam. 7:14; I Chron. 22:10; 28:6; Psalm 89:26-27
    - a. Quoted and applied to Jesus- Mt 3:16-17; 17:5; Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5; 5:5
- D. 2:8-9 Universal dominion- nations and ends of the earth

- E. 2:10-12 The kings are called to submit to God and his king
- F. The king is a conquering king who will vanquish all his foes

#### IV. Psalm 72

- A. This and Psalm 127 are attributed to Solomon
- B. 72:1-4 May God give justice by the king
  - 1. Verses 1-2, Judgments/ Justice and righteousness—II Sam 8:15; I Kings 10:9; Is 9:6-7; 11:2-5; 32:1
  - 2. Verse 2, afflicted- 2, 4, 12, needy- 4, 12, 13, 13 and poor- 13. The ideal ruler stands up for the weakest- Prov 29:14; 31:8-9; Is 11:4-5; Jer 22:15-16
  - 3. Verse 3, Peace-Is 2:4; 9:6; Mic 4:3-4; Zech. 9:10
  - 4. Verse 4, Crush the oppressor- Prov 20:8, 26; Isaiah 11:4
- C. 72:5-7 Prayer for life and blessings on king
  - 1. Verse 5, nations fear Him
  - 2. Verse 6, rain upon the grass- Deut. 32:2; II Sam. 23:4
- D. 72:15-17 Prayer for longevity and prosperity of the king
  - 1. Verse 15, let them pray for him continually- I Tim 2:1-2
  - 2. Verse 16, an abundance of grain on the tops of the mountains- an abundance in the most unpromising place
  - 3. Verse 17, Promises to Abraham Gen 12:1-3; 22:18
- E. 72:18-20 Doxology
  - 1. Verse 18, The nations will be blessed (17) and blessed by God (18, 19)
  - 2. Verse 19, name—vs. 17 the king's name and vs. 19 God's name
- F. This is the end of book 2 of the Psalms

#### V. Psalm 110

- A. The Psalm
  - 1. 110:1-3 Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool
    - a. Verse 1 Right hand a position of power- Judges 5:26; Job 40:14; Psalm 21:8
    - b. Verse 1 A footstool- Joshua 10:24; Isaiah 51:23
  - 2. 110:4-7 You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek
    - a. Verse 5
      - 1) Lord at king's right hand
      - 2) He will shatter kings

- b. Verse 6 judge among the nations and shatter chiefs
- c. Verse 7 lift up his head- Judges 8:28; Zech. 1:21

B. Psalm 110:1 and Jesus

- 1. He is David's LORD as well as His Son- Matt 22:41-46
- 2. He is greater than David- Acts 2:34- and greater than the angels- Heb. 1:13
- 3. God exalted Him as man rejected Him- Acts 5:30
- 4. He reigns as Savior and Intercessor- Acts 5:31; Rom 8:34
- 5. His sitting is an indication of a finished task- Heb 10:11
- 6. Till... He still has a victory over death in the future- Heb 10:13; I Cor 15:25
- 7. Idea from Kidner, Psalms 73-150, (393).

C. Psalm 110:4 and Jesus

- 1. Hebrews 5:6; 7:17, 21
- 2. 7:1-3 Melchizedek- king of righteousness
  - a. King of Salem- king of peace.
  - b. He is not a priest on the basis of His genealogy
- 3. 7:4-10 He blessed Abraham and Abraham paid his tithes- both show Melchizedek is greater
- 4. 7:17 the word "forever" is stressed- power of indestructible life in 7:16
- 5. 7:21 the word "sworn" is stressed- with an oath in 7:21

D. Arguments that the psalm has OT fulfilment

- 1. This is the general pattern of the psalms
- 2. The kings did exercise some priestly functions- II Samuel 6:14-18; 8:18
- 3. Some of the references do not make sense of Jesus- 5-7

E. Arguments that the psalm has NT fulfilment

- 1. The term used in 110:1 translated "The Lord says" often refers to a prophetic oracle
- 2. Priestly functions of the kings are limited- II Chronicles 26
- 3. NT use argue for direct Messianic fulfillment- Matthew 22:41-46

VI. Psalm 89

A. Lovingkindness & Faithfulness

- 1. Loving kindness- 89: 1, 2, 14, 24, 28, 33, 49
- 2. Faithfulness- 89:1, 2, 5, 8, 24, 33, 49
- 3. Covenant- 89:3, 28, 34, 39
- 4. David 89:3, 20, 35, 49

5. 89:1-18 A hymn of praise to God
  6. Verses 6, 8, Who is comparable to the LORD?
  7. Verses 9-10. God controls the seas and defeats His foes
  8. 89:19-37 The covenant with David- This is a poetic retelling of II Sam 7
  9. 25-27 The king was the highest of kings
- B. Comparisons between God (1-18) and King (19-37)
1. God of gods- 89:6-9 / king of kings- 89:27
  2. God defeats foes- 89:13 / king defeats foes- 89:21-23
  3. God raises horn people- 89:17-18 / raises the king's horn- 89:24
  4. God rules the seas- 89:9-10 / king rules from sea to sea- 89:25
  5. God's throne upheld by righteousness and justice- 89:14 / and king is upheld by these- 89:24
  6. God is Most High- idea, not term- 89:6-9 / and king is most high- 89:26-27
- C. Is this the historical reality?
1. Josiah- He is killed in battle by Pharaoh Neco- II Kings 23:29-30
  2. Jehoahaz- He ruled only 3 months and was removed by Pharaoh and taken to Egypt- II Kings 23:31-33. He went into Egypt and never returned- Jer. 22:10-12
  3. Jehoiakim- He was placed on the throne by Egypt, he changed his allegiance to Babylon when they defeated Egypt. He rebelled against Babylon at the first sign of weakness and Babylon attacks him and he dies- II Kings 23:34-24:7
  4. Jehoiachin- He reigns only three months and he and his mother surrender to Babylon. He is carried into captivity and never returns- II Kings 24:8-17; Jer. 22:24-30
  5. Zedekiah- He does not listen to Jeremiah to surrender to Babylon. The city and palace are burned and the people are taken into captivity. He is captured and his sons are killed as he watches helpless and his eyes are put out- II Kings 24:18-25:7
- D. Contrast 89:19-37 & 38-52
1. 89:38-52 Lament: What happened to the covenant with David? Psalm 89 moves from praise to lament
  2. King Exalted- 89:19, 24 / Enemies Exalted- 89:42
  3. Anointed, established- 89:20-21 / cast off, rejected the Anointed- 89:38
  4. Right hand of king- 89:25 / right hand of enemies- 89:42
  5. Loving kindness- 89:33 / wrath- 89:38
  6. Covenant confirmed- 89:28 / Covenant spurned- 89:39
  7. "Where are your former lovingkindnesses, O LORD, which You swore to David in Your faithfulness?" 89:49

## VII. Themes of Royal Psalms

- A. King receives authority/dominion from God- 2:2, 6-8; 20:6; 45:6-7; 72:1; 89:3-4, 19-20; 110:1-2
- B. The king is a descendent of David- 18:50; 89:3-4, 20, 28-29, 35-37, 49; 132:1, 10,11, 17; 144:10
- C. The king is God's anointed- 2:2; 18:50; 20:6; 45:7; 89:20, 38, 51; 132: 10, 17
- D. God is the source of the king's strength- 2:4-9; 18:1-3; 20:1-2, 6-7; 21:1; 89:22, 24; 110:2, 5; 114:1-2, 10-11
- E. The king's reign built on justice/righteousness- 45:4, 6-7; 72:2-4, 7, 12-14; 101
- F. With God's strength, the king shatters his foes - 2:9; 18:27-42, 46-50; 20:8; 21:8-12; 45:3-5; 89:23; 110:1, 5-6; 132:18; 144:2, 5-8
- G. The king's name will endure forever- 18:50; 45:17; 72:5, 17; 89:4, 28, 29, 36, 37; 132:12
- H. King's reign will be universal- 2:8-9; 18:43-45; 45:12; 72:8-11; 89:24-27; 110:2, 5-6

#### VIII. Royal Psalms and the NT

##### A. Psalm 2

1. 2: 1-2 Acts 4:25-28
2. 2: 7 Matt. 3:17; 17:5; Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5; 5:5; Revelation 21:7 echoes this
3. 2: 8-9 Revelation 2:26-27
4. 2: 9 Revelation 12:5; 19:15

##### B. Psalm 45

1. 45: 6-7 Hebrews 1:8-9

##### C. Psalm 89

1. 89: 20 seems to be alluded to in Acts 13:22
2. 89: 26-27 may be echoed in Hebrews 1:8-9

##### D. Psalm 132

1. 132: 11 Acts 2:30

##### E. Psalm 110

1. 110: 1 Matthew 22:41-46; Acts 2:34-35; I Cor 15:25-26; Heb 1:13; 10:12-13; I Cor 15 is still future
2. Every reference to Jesus at the right hand of God- Matthew 26:64; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 8:1
3. 110: 4 Hebrews 5:6; 7:17, 21

#### IX. Jesus: Heir of David

- A. Matthew 1:1-17; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:9, 15; 22:41-46
- B. Mark 10:47-48
- C. Luke 1:27; 31-33; 3:31; 18:38-39
- D. John 7:42
- E. Acts 2:25-36; 13:22, 33-36; 15:16
- F. Romans 1:3; 15:12

X. Jesus as King

- A. Matthew 1:1-17; 2:5; 27:11, 29, 37, 42
- B. Mark 15:2, 9, 12, 18, 26, 32
- C. Luke 19:38; 23:2-3, 37-38
- D. John 1:49; 12:13, 15; 18:33, 37, 39; 19:3, 12, 14, 15, 19-22
- E. Most of the passages from the gospels that speak of Jesus as King are tied to the cross. The cross is His throne.
- F. Acts 17:7
- G. Revelation 1:5; 11:15; 17:14; 19:14

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## Songs of Ascents

*David Raif*

**Text: Psalms 120-134**

**Introduction:**

- I. Imagine the excitement of Israelites arriving in Jerusalem for feast days. The city was more than just a political or economic center; it was home for the entire nation. Multiple times yearly, pious Hebrews from distant lands traveled to see the familiar gates, to reunite with family and friends, and to meet new friendly faces. The fellowship of a family was brought together by the blessings and promises associated with the worship of YHWH. This was the place YHWH had chosen for his name to dwell, and he was calling his people home.
  
- II. Yearly feasts were a joyful experience for devout Israelites, but Jerusalem was not always accessible to Israel. During the years of captivity, the people of God could only point their face longingly in prayer to the place where the temple once stood (1Ki. 8.48; Dan. 6.10), but when YHWH stirred up the spirit of Cyrus to allow and encourage the rebuilding of temple, the journeys home took on a greater significance. The blessing taken away had now been restored. They had returned home.
  
- III. Psalms 120-134 are fifteen psalms entitled “Songs of Ascents” in the fifth book of the book of psalms. They seem to have been collected purposefully to celebrate the journey and arrival in Jerusalem on these festive occasions and to praise God for allowing them to return after the long wait through captivity. As such they serve Christians as we make our own pilgrimages home. They are our traveling songs as we share the journey with others and celebrate the hope of arriving in the heavenly Jerusalem, our home.

**Body:****I. Title: “Songs of Ascents”**

- A. “Songs of Ascents” refers to a group of fifteen psalms (Psalms 120-134) in the fifth book of the book of Psalms. Each psalm begins with the title “song of ascents” (ESV, NASB) or “song of degrees” (KJV).<sup>4</sup> *Hama’aloth* is translated frequently in the Old Testament as “steps” or “stairway” (e.g. Ex. 20.26; 2Ki. 20.9-11) and on at least one occasion, refers particularly to the act of going up or ascending to Jerusalem (e.g. Ez. 7.9).
- B. The meaning of the title is not certain. Some have suggested it may refer to a rhetorical stair-stepping repetition<sup>5</sup> or to their characteristic words of extolment,<sup>6</sup> but a more traditional ritual or historical explanation seems more reasonable. It seems “Songs of Ascents” does refer to a physical ascension to the temple, either
1. going up to Jerusalem for the **thrice yearly pilgrimage feasts** commanded in the Law (Ex. 23:14–17; Deut. 16.16; Is. 30:29<sup>7</sup>), or
  2. ascending to Jerusalem in the **historical return** of the captives in the book of Ezra (2Chr. 36.23; Ezra 1.3; 2.1; 7.7), or
  3. some **other processional** up to the temple in Jerusalem (2Sa. 6:12; 2Ki. 23:2).
- C. Were the Songs of Ascents collected with one of these purposes in mind? Did the editor of the psalter have a blend of these ideas when he finalized the Songs of Ascents? While certainty about the collection’s original purpose may not be reached, clues from the Songs of Ascents, namely from their content, their shared structure, and their place within the psalter, may help us see the Songs of Ascents as a group of psalms collected after the captivity celebrating the both the yearly feasts and the return from exile.

**II. The Content of the Songs of Ascents**

- A. Traditionally these psalms have been connected to temple worship. Two references in the Mishnah traditionally connect the fifteen steps in the temple between the Israelite Court and the Women’s Court to the fifteen Songs of Ascents (m. Sukkah 5.4; m. Middoth 2.5). In each passage, Levites play their instruments on the steps.<sup>8</sup> There is no way to confirm this tradition or to confirm to what period this refers. Were these fifteen steps part of

<sup>4</sup> שיר המעלות *Shir Hama’aloth* - This title appears in all fifteen psalms with only minor variation in Psalm 121 (שיר למעלות *Shir Lama’aloth*).

<sup>5</sup> Dahood argues in the Anchor Bible Commentary that the Songs of Ascents are poems “characterized by the ‘ascending’ structure, in which each verse takes up and repeats a word or clause from the preceding verse.” In Psalm 120, he cites the “treacherous tongue” in vv. 2 & 3, “dwelling” in vv. 5 & 6, and “peace” in vv. 6 & 7 as examples (194). However, Allen in the World Biblical Commentary observes “the phenomenon is not restricted to this particular group of psalms, nor does it appear consistently in all its members” (Allen 193).

<sup>6</sup> Dahood also argues in light of Qumran text for the possibility of translating *shir hama’aloth* as “song of extolments.” Many in the collection are psalms of praise, but Dahood admits several do not match the description of “extolments” (Dahood, 195).

<sup>7</sup> Isaiah compares the rejoicing of Israel at the downfall of the nations with the rejoicing during feast days and going to the mountain of YHWH: “You will have songs as in the night when you keep the festival, And gladness of heart as when one marches to the sound of the flute, To go to the mountain of the LORD.” (Isaiah 30:29, NASB 2020)

<sup>8</sup> The Talmud has some even more interesting fables linking the Songs of Ascents and David. Supposedly David recited the fifteen psalms of ascents in order to fix temple drainpipes that threatened to flood the whole world (<https://www.sefaria.org/Sukkah.53a.12>).

Zerubbabel's temple? Were they part of Herod's renovation? When was the Court of Women constructed? While specifics about these references from the Mishnah are not convincing, it is significant to see that throughout generations these Songs of Ascents were used to focus God's people on the worship of YHWH.

- B. The vocabulary of Psalms 120-134 clearly focuses on YHWH, his dwelling place in Jerusalem, and the deep blessings associated with worship of God.

1. YHWH x 51 <sup>9</sup>	9. House <i>bayith</i> x 7
2. Keep <i>shamar</i> x 12	10. Peace <i>shalom</i> x 7
3. Blessing x 12 ( <i>barak</i> x 9   <i>esher</i> x 3)	11. Jerusalem x 5
4. Soul <i>nephesh</i> x 11	12. David x 5 <sup>10</sup>
5. Israel x 9	13. Mountain <i>har</i> x 4
6. Zion x 7	14. Dwelling <i>shakan</i> x 3
7. Children <i>ben</i> x 7	15. Gracious <i>chanan</i> x 3
8. Eyes <i>ayin</i> x 7	

- C. Liebreich sees the Songs of Ascents as an elaboration of four key terms from Aaron's benediction in Num. 6.22-27 (bless x 9, keep x 12, grace x 3, and peace x 7), representing the earliest interpretation of the Priestly Blessing (36). At least two psalms in this collection do not share any of these words (126, 131), but where the vocabulary is missing, the concepts are present. The general focus on Jerusalem and the blessings upon the people through worship at Zion make this connection compelling.

### III. The Structure of the Songs of Ascents

- A. The Psalms in this collection were penned at various times. Four psalms assigned to David (122, 124, 131, and 134) and one to Solomon (127) were probably penned during the united kingdom. Others can be identified thematically as exilic or post-exilic psalms (e.g. 120, 125, 126). While each had its own historical context and purpose, a later editor collected and repurposed these psalms, inserting their current title (possibly Ezra or a contemporary?).
- B. Apart from the title, shared vocabulary, phrases, themes, and rhetorical constructions make it obvious these psalms were grouped purposefully.
- C. The Songs of Ascents seem to chronicle the whole pilgrimage experience, moving generally from exile to Zion. Psalm 120 laments the time the psalmist has been distanced from Jerusalem, living among the wicked in foreign lands, but very quickly the eyes lifted up to the hills in anticipation of arrival. Many of the psalms then rejoice in being in Jerusalem and in receiving blessing because of their relationship with God.
- D. Going to Jerusalem is not just about the temple. The structure of the Songs of Ascents points to David, his dynasty, and the faithfulness of God to Messianic promises. Robertson observes that the middle psalm (127), the only one written by Solomon, is flanked by two groups of seven psalms, each group containing two psalms of David and each group containing the word YHWH 24 times (Robertson 212). Here is an adaptation of Robertson's outline highlighting the focus on the Davidic promises:

<sup>9</sup> This is especially significant when compared to the frequency of *Elohim* in the Songs of Ascents, only twice. In each case, *Elohim* is immediately connected to YHWH. "YHWH our *Elohim*" (Ps. 122.9; 123.2). This ratio is similar to that of all the psalms in Book V (YHWH – 236 | *Elohim* – 31).

<sup>10</sup> *David* appears nine times, but four of those occurrences are in titles. Four of the remain all occur in Ps. 132.

120		128
121		129
122 - Psalm of David		130
123 - Anon. psalm	127 - Psalm of Solomon	131 - Psalm of David
	enthronement of YHWH	132 - Anon. psalm about the horn/lamp of David
124 - Psalm of David		133 - Psalm of David
125		134
126		

1. Significantly, Psalm 127, the central psalm, is written by David's son Solomon, the heir and continuation of the Messianic promise (2Sa. 7). It speaks of God's watchfulness over a house and a city and the blessing of offspring. While these would be truths for any family, coming from Solomon, it seems this psalm offers messages about Jerusalem, the royal line, and the hope of the Messiah.
  2. Psalm 123 falls between the two Davidic psalms and speaks of YHWH as the king to whom the psalmist faithfully humbles himself.
  3. In Psalm 131, David finishes with a plea to the nation to hope in YHWH forever. Psalm 132 follows by remembering David's vow to YHWH and then more importantly, YHWH's vow to David: he would choose Zion as his resting place forever (132.13-14) and would cause "the horn of David to spring forth" (132.17). Psalm 132 and the Songs of Ascents are a definitive answer to Psalm 89's doubt about God's seeming abandonment of his promises to David in captivity (89.49). Now, with YHWH enthroned in the hearts the nation, the hope of the Davidic line is a hope for Jerusalem is a hope for the nation.
- E. Putting these thoughts together, the Songs of Ascents represent a celebration of festival pilgrimages to Jerusalem, but there is a recognition that the continuation of these festivals after captivity represents a continuation of the nation's relationship with YHWH and a continued hope for the Messianic promises.

#### IV. The Songs of Ascents within the Psalter

- A. Reading the Songs of Ascents as a celebration of Israel's return from the ashes of captivity fits well into the overall structure of the Psalter.
- B. It has been common to approach the Psalter like a song book. With this mentality, some order is recognized in the book of psalms (e.g the divisions of the five books, certain groupings scattered throughout), but it is supposed that each psalm mostly functions independently from the others.
  1. This has been the approach generally of biblical scholarship in the twentieth century. Scholars like Hermann Gunkel focused on the categorization of individual psalms into genres (e.g. Praise, Individual Thanksgiving, Individual Lament, Communal Lament, Royal, Wisdom) to discover their "original life-settings." Gunkel's work was widely accepted and had a profound effect on the study of the psalms (Ridderbos and Craigie 1033-1035). However, this emphasis on the individuality of the psalms also minimized consideration of the arrangement of the psalms.
  2. Gerald H. Wilson writes of the result: "Regardless of the abundance of illumination which this process has contributed...[the effect] has been to emphasize the significance of genres of similar pss (and thus isolated, individual pss) while minimizing the importance of the canonical order. As a result, the canonical

arrangement comes to be viewed almost as an accidental product of an extended collection process” (G. H. Wilson 2).

- C. My own study of the psalms has largely been focused on individual psalms and their genres. However, I have been intrigued in the last few years by the idea of reading the book of Psalms as a book rather than an anthology, listening to the connections between the psalms and the narrative they relate.
1. For more information about this approach to the psalter, consult these resources:
    - a. Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, 1985. – Originally presented as a PhD dissertation at Yale in 1981, Wilson challenged the conclusions of Gunkel and others that saw no purpose or meaning to the final arrangement of the psalms. His work changed the course of psalms studies. The following two resources continue in the same vein of research.
    - b. Jeff T. Wilson, *The Rhetoric of Reflection: Hebrew Roots of Cognition and the Final Form of the Masoretic Text of the Psalter*, 2008. – Jeff Wilson preaches for the Kleinwood church in Houston TX. He presented this as his PhD dissertation at Baylor University. His work builds upon that of G.H. Wilson, giving further evidence for the intentional arrangement of the Psalms in their final form. Accessible online: <https://baylor-ir.tdl.org/handle/2104/5336>
    - c. O. Palmer Robertson, *The Flow of the Psalms*, 2015. – Robertson’s book attempts to demonstrate the purposeful structuring of the book of Psalms to tell the story of the redemption of Israel. Robertson provides charts at the end of his book summarizing some of the mountain tops of his research. The charts are freely available online: [http://storage.googleapis.com/prpbooks/documents/pdf/extra/9781629951331/Flow-of-the-Psalms\\_Charts.pdf](http://storage.googleapis.com/prpbooks/documents/pdf/extra/9781629951331/Flow-of-the-Psalms_Charts.pdf)
  2. While studying the structure of any book, care is needed to not impose imagined structures onto the text. Each of the books above connect the dots in slightly different ways. There is value in considering the connections others make and discovering connecting points one had not seen before.
  3. From my study of the psalms, it seems probable to me that...
    - a. Over the five books, there is movement shifting from a focus on David to a loss of David in captivity and then a refocus on the Davidic promises when the nation of Israel is resurrected from Babylon.
    - b. Book 5 is an invitation to worship YHWH who has redeemed Israel from exile.
      - 1) Book 5 begins with “Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, For His mercy is everlasting. The redeemed of the LORD shall say so, Those whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy” (Psalm 107:1–2, NASB 2020).
      - 2) Psalm 119 stand in the middle of the book, a praising of the Law of YHWH. Praising the words of YHWH is the ultimate appreciation of their relationship with YHWH.
      - 3) Several purposefully placed groups of psalms praise YHWH for his redemption complete the picture of this thanksgiving of the redeemed. As Longman describes it, “As we move toward the end, praise overtakes lament until at the very end of the book we have a virtual fireworks of praise” (Longman 45).

- c. The Songs of Ascents fit into this narrative as a celebration of God's redeeming love. The fact of Israel's to return to Jerusalem in worship implies a reconnection with YHWH and a reconnection with his promises to his people.

**Conclusion:**

- I. Pilgrimages home to Jerusalem were made richer with the realization that Israel is redeemed and YHWH is faithful. The prodigal son did not fail to appreciate the second chance.
- II. The Songs of Ascents play an important part in the Psalter as the people of God look to YHWH as redeemer and at Jerusalem as their connection to him.
- III. As Spiritual Israel, redeemed by YHWH, these are our traveling songs as we make our own pilgrimages home. We share the journey with others and celebrate the hope of arriving in the heavenly Jerusalem, our home.

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## Observations related to Psalms 82, 87, and 115

*Jeff Smelser*

**Text: Psalm 82 & John 10:34-36, Psalm 87, Psalm 115**

### **Introduction:**

- I. These are just a few observations that I find interesting and believe to be important, and which none of the other speakers had planned to discuss. And in fact, I rarely hear these discussed.

### **Body:**

- I. Psalm 82 and Jesus' Point in John 10:35-36
  - A. Psalm 82 has been variously interpreted as
    1. ...a rebuke directed toward angels.
    2. ...a rebuke directed toward Babylonian rulers.
      - a. It is supposed that mention of God's place over the nations (Psalm 82:8) supports a reference to foreign, non-Israelite, rulers.
      - b. However, God's activity in connection with Israel specific issues, and even individual specific issues, is elsewhere set in the context of his rule over all.
        - 1) David, who prayed for deliverance as Saul's agents lay in wait for him, called upon God who scoffs "at all the nations" (Psalm 59:8).
        - 2) Hannah, who had suffered provocation from her rival, Peninnah, gave thanks to the God who set the earth on its pillars and who "will judge the end of the earth" as she exulted in God's having blessed her with a son (1 Samuel 2:1-10).
    3. ...a rebuke of judges within Israel.
      - a. The language of Psalm 82 is reminiscent of the charge given to judges in such passages as Deuteronomy 1:16-17 and Leviticus 19:15.
      - b. I believe this to be the clear meaning of the Psalm
  - B. A brief exegesis
    1. Verse 1 affirms that God is the ultimate judge
    2. Verse 2 introduces the cause for the rebuke: Partiality and unjust judgment rendered by the those addressed.
    3. Verses 3-4 admonish these judges
    4. Verse 5 now speaks of these judges in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person. The foundations of society are shaken when those responsible for administering justice are themselves corrupt.

5. Verse 6 alludes to passages in the law where judges were referred to as ELOHIM, *i.e.*, “gods”
- a. In Exodus 21:6, 22:8, where the word ELOHIM occurs, some translations say “judges,” and indeed the context in both instances suggest human judges, who represent God’s authority, are in view.
  - b. In Exodus 22:28 (“you shall not curse God, nor curse a ruler of your people”) the mention of “God” (ELOHIM) in the first clause is thought by many to be a reference to judges who acted as God’s representatives. See for example the footnote in the NET Bible.
  - c. In Deuteronomy 19:17, two disputants are to stand before Yahweh, which is further explained to mean, “before the priests and the judges who will be in office in those days,” that is, before the Lord’s representatives.
  - d. A rationale for referring to these judges as Elohim is seen in Deuteronomy 1:17, where the judgments rendered by those judges appointed by Moses is said to be God’s judgment.
    - 1) Notice the parallel between the responsibility given to the judges appointed by Moses and the rebuke of Psalm 82:2-4.
      - a) Dt 1:16-17
 

“Then I ordered your judges at that time, saying, ‘Hear the cases between your fellow countrymen and **judge righteously** between a person and his fellow countryman, or the stranger who is with him. **You are not to show partiality** in judgment; you shall **hear the small and the great alike**. You are not to be afraid of any person, for the judgment is God’s.’”
      - b) Psalm 82:2-4
 

**How long will you judge unjustly**  
And **show partiality** to the wicked? *Selah*  
**Vindicate the weak and fatherless;**  
**Do justice to the afflicted and destitute.**  
**Rescue the weak and needy;**  
Save them from the hand of the wicked.
- | Dt 1:16-17                         | Psalm 82:2-4   |
|------------------------------------|--|
| judge righteously                  | How long will you judge unjustly?  |
| You are not to show partiality     | How long will you...show partiality?   |
| hear the small and the great alike | Vindicate the weak and fatherless;<br>Do justice to the afflicted and destitute.<br>Rescue the weak and needy; |
- e. Judges may have received direct revelation from God on occasion. See for example...
    - 1) Judges 3:10, where it is said that “the Spirit of the Lord came upon” Othniel.
    - 2) Judges 4:4, where Deborah, who judged Israel, is describes as a prophetess.

6. Verse 7 reminds them that they are in fact merely mortal men, notwithstanding their role as God's judges in Israel.
7. Verse 8 exalts God as the judge of all, a truth which should be both a warning to these corrupt judges and an assurance to their victims.

C. Relation to John 10:34-35

1. The Jews were going to stone Jesus because, they said, "you make yourself God" (Jn 10:33).
2. To suppose that Jesus' quotation of Psalm 82:6 is merely to say, "I'm as much a god as the Old Testament judges" does not give Jesus his due, nor was that his meaning.
3. Jesus draws a contrast between the OT judges, "to whom the word of God came," and himself, whom "the Father sanctified and sent into the world."
  - a. OT judges, who were called "gods," **received** the law and were to be guided by it. Perhaps on some occasions, OT judges **received** direct revelation to assist them in rendering judgments. (See above, I,B,5,e.)
  - b. Jesus, on the other hand, was the Word become flesh. **Not a mere recipient of revelation, he was himself the revelation of God.** How much more it was proper that he be called God than those OT judges. He is indeed God.

II. Psalm 87

- A. This psalm beautifully sets forth the concept developed by Paul in Galatians 3-4.
  1. In Galatians, Paul develops the notion of adoption as God's children
  2. Those who are truly descendants of Abraham and heirs of the promises made to him are those who have been adopted through Christ, and not necessarily those of his fleshly posterity.
- B. The psalm introduces Zion, the city of God, loved by God.
- C. Then the Psalm describes those who are reckoned as natural born citizens to include people who were not naturally born there.
  1. Consider our use of the word "naturalized" to refer to those who attain United States Citizenship though they were born elsewhere.
  2. In saying they are "naturalized," we are saying they are reckoned as having been born here.
  3. So in the Psalm the following are mentioned as naturalized citizens of the City of God:
    - a. Rahab
      - 1) This is not the same word as the name of the Jericho harlot who sheltered the spies. That name is רַחַב. The word here is רַהַב. The difference is the middle consonant, the guttural "heth" (ח), in the woman's name, versus the softer, breathier "he" (ה), in the word for the people mentioned in the Psalm.

- 2) Rahab רָהַב is “pride” or “arrogance.” BDB glosses its verb cognate, “act stormily boisterously, arrogantly,” and the adjective, “proud, defiant.”
  - a) The noun is used of a defiant sea creature in Job 9:13
  - b) Perhaps having in mind the crocodile, the word is used as a symbol for defiant Egypt in Isaiah 51:9 (God “cut Rahab in pieces” and “dried up the sea” “for the redeemed to cross over”) and in Psalm 89:10.
  - c) So also here in Psalm 87:4, “Rahab” stands for Egypt.
- b. Babylon
  - 1) If as some suppose, this psalm was written after the captivity, it is a remarkable thought that people of Babylon would be spoken of as sons of the holy city of God.
  - 2) The language “those who know me” brings to mind Jeremiah 31:34, where the people of the new covenant will be those who know the Lord.
- c. Philistia
  - 1) Even those of the perennial enemies of Israel during the reigns of Saul and David can be included.
- d. Tyre & Ethiopia
  - 1) With Tyre and Ethiopia, the places mentioned complete the circle in all directions around Jerusalem
- D. The Psalm connects the promise to Abraham (“All families/nations blessed”) with what is realized in the church, the Jerusalem from above.
  1. People from all nations will be share in the glorious city of God.
  2. God declares, “this one was born here,” and thus they are citizens of God’s city as Isaac was a son, not by fleshly means, but by God’s promise.

### III. Psalm 115

- A. Several passages in the OT, including Psalm 115:17, speak of the dead as knowing nothing, as not praising God
  1. Jehovah’s Witnesses, 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventists, and Christadelphians teach that the dead are not conscience; that there is no immaterial spirit. Psalm 115:17 is sometimes cited as a proof text.
    - a. 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventists on Psalm 115:17
      - 1) <https://sthelenaca.adventistchurch.org/about/worship-with-us/bible-studies/are-you-ready-for-jesus-to-come/awake-or-asleep#:~:text=The%20dead%20do%20not%20praise,His%20resurrection%20we%20have%20hope.>
      - 2) <https://www.fwpcenter.org/2020/05/01/are-dead-really-dead/>
      - 3) <https://www.fulcrum7.com/blog/2020/5/10/the-dead-praise-not-the-lord>
    - b. Christadelphians on Psalm 115:17

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- 1) <https://www.kcce.org.au/cms/what-do-we-believe/>
  - 2) [http://www.christadelphians.ns.ca/what-is-death/?utm\\_source=rss&utm\\_medium=rss&utm\\_campaign=what-is-death](http://www.christadelphians.ns.ca/what-is-death/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=what-is-death)
- c. Jehovah's Witnesses certainly teach this doctrine, however, I don't find many references by JWs to this particular passage in connection with their doctrine.
- B. The explanation presented herein of Psalm 115:17 and similar passages is one I have never seen anyone else advocate. That is unsettling. We should not expect to come up with a correct understanding of a passage that no one else over the last two thousand years has ever discovered. If the following is correct, I can only assume someone else at some time, has already understood this, and I simply am not aware of that.
- C. Many of us tend to think of *Sheol* in terms of our understanding of Hades, which means we think of a neatly divided existence, one part bliss and one part agony.
1. I'm not denying the identity of Sheol with Hades.
  2. I am merely calling attention to a finely crafted understanding of Hades that sometimes focuses more on the accommodations for the righteous brought about by Jesus than on the fundamental fact that death was not God's plan for man.
  3. With this focus, it is difficult for us to understand a righteous saint's dread of Sheol.
    - a. But we should understand that the baseline view of death is defeat.
    - b. It is the consequence of sin. (Gen 2:17, Romans 6:23)
    - c. It is the "pit" (Psalm 88:4, Isaiah 38:17)
    - d. It is not the door to our reward; it is something to be overcome through Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:54-57)
    - e. In Luke 20:35, Acts 4:2, and Philippians 3:11 the expression is "resurrection out of the dead." Whether we think of that as resurrection out from among the dead ones, or as resurrection from death, the idea is that the saint aspires to escape the fate of the dead.
    - f. In the context of this understanding, the view of Sheol in the passages we will discuss is not unexpected.
      - 1) But it should also be noted that in each of these passages, the speaker is conscious of some sin in his life, some way in which he knows he has displeased God.
      - 2) It is my belief that in each of these passages, the death of those estranged from God is in view, and the speaker does not want to be classed with them. The point is not the annihilation of the dead, but the separation of the dead from God.
        - a) The dead are eternally estranged. They do not praise God.
        - b) Aware of this, and of his own failing, in each of these passages the speaker sees death for what it is, apart from the justification that God will ultimately provide in the Christ, a justification which the speaker himself may not fully understand but one to which he aspires.
  4. Certainly, those who die in the Lord are spared the torment experienced by the Rich man (Luke 16) and are in fact comforted (Luke 16); they are with Christ (Philippians

1:23), and at rest (Revelation 6:11). God's people are not separated from God in death (Psalm 139).

- a. But this is the exception, not the rule; it is the provision made for those who will ultimately overcome death in the Resurrection.
  - b. Death itself is something to be overcome.
- D. When we read in the OT about going down to the pit, about the dead not praising God, we should understand the speakers to be viewing death as defeat, even though they themselves aspire to justification and resurrection.
- E. Passages similar to Psalm 115:17...
1. Psalm 30:9
    - a. In verse 6, David describes having had a misplaced confidence, a confidence based on his prosperity, when he had said, "I shall never be moved."
    - b. In verse 7a, David, now with a better perspective, sets the record straight: It is by God's favor that he has been made to stand.
    - c. But in verse 7b, David describes the consequence of his prior errant trust in his prosperity: "Thou didst hid Thy face, I was dismayed."
    - d. In verse 8, David describes calling out to God pleadingly.
    - e. In verse 9, we have David's plea: "What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise Thee? Will it declare Thy faithfulness?"
      - 1) Here we have a hint of man's purpose. It is to praise God and declare his faithfulness.
      - 2) But if David dies estranged from God, he will not accomplish that purpose.
      - 3) David's plea is that he might no longer be estranged from God, and that he might accomplish his purpose.
      - 4) David's words are not teaching annihilation, but the implications of estrangement.
  2. Isaiah 38:18
    - a. Isaiah, the prophet of God, had told Hezekiah to set his house in order and prepare for his death (38:1).
    - b. Hezekiah prayed to the Lord and was granted a 15 year extension of life.
      - 1) In his thanksgiving for the reprieve, Hezekiah says, "Thou has cast all mysins behind Thy back" (Isaiah 28:17).
  3. Psalm 88:11-12
    - a. The psalmist views himself as...
      - 1) ...having been the subject of God's wrath (88:7)
      - 2) ...having been rejected by God (88:14)
      - 3) ...the object of God's anger
- F. Psalm 115

1. Psalm 115 has alternating structure (call it chiasmatic if you please) contrasting God and those who trust in Him with the idols and those who trust in them.

<sup>1</sup> Not to us, LORD, not to us,  
 But to Your name give glory,  
 Because of Your mercy, because of Your truth.  
<sup>2</sup> Why should the nations say,  
 “Where, then, is their God?”  
<sup>3</sup> But our God is in the heavens;  
 He does whatever He pleases.  
<sup>4</sup> Their idols are silver and gold,  
 The work of human hands.  
<sup>5</sup> They have mouths, but they cannot speak;  
 They have eyes, but they cannot see;  
<sup>6</sup> They have ears, but they cannot hear;  
 They have noses, but they cannot smell;  
<sup>7</sup> They have hands, but they cannot feel;  
 They have feet, but they cannot walk;  
 They cannot make a sound with their throat.  
<sup>8</sup> Those who make them <sup>Ⓜ</sup>will become like them,  
 Everyone who trusts in them.  
<sup>9</sup> Israel, trust in the LORD;  
 He is their help and their shield.  
<sup>10</sup> House of Aaron, trust in the LORD;  
 He is their help and their shield.  
<sup>11</sup> You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD;  
 He is their help and their shield.  
<sup>12</sup> The LORD has been mindful of us; He will bless us.  
 He will bless the house of Israel;  
 He will bless the house of Aaron.  
<sup>13</sup> He will bless those who fear the LORD,  
 The small together with the great.  
<sup>14</sup> May the LORD increase you,  
 You and your children.  
<sup>15</sup> May you be blessed of the LORD,  
 Maker of heaven and earth.  
<sup>16</sup> The heavens are the heavens of the LORD,  
 But the earth He has given to the sons of mankind.  
<sup>17</sup> The dead do not praise the LORD,  
 Nor do any who go down into silence;  
<sup>18</sup> But as for us, we will bless the LORD  
 From this time and forever.  
 Praise the LORD!

2. Notice that verse 17 is in a section pertaining to the earth in contrast with the heavens, pertaining to the Lord in contrast to the sons of mankind.

3. Specifically, those who do not praise the Lord (the dead) are contrasted with “us” who “bless the Lord from this time and forever.”

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