

## Introduction to the Book of Psalms

### I. Name and nature of the book:

- A. Hebrew name: *sefer tehilim* (Book of Praises)
- B. Greek name: *Psalmoi* (Poems to be accompanied by a stringed instrument)
- C. Consists of prayers, praises, historical recollections, soliloquies, and prophecies.

### II. Hebrew Poetry

- A. Common mode of expression in both wisdom literature and the prophets
- B. Parallelism: synonymous, antithetical, intensifying, clarifying
- C. Chiasm, or chiasitic structure (30:8-10)
- D. Acrostics — Pss. 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119 and 145

### III. Authorship

- A. Fifty anonymous Psalms— 1, 2, 10, 33, 43, 66, 67, 71, 91-100, 102, 104-107, 111-121, 123, 125, 126, 128-130, 132, 134-137, 146-150
- B. Seventy-three attributed to David—Some that lack a title are attributed to him in the NT—Ps. 2 (Acts 4:25), Ps. 95 (Heb.4:7)
- C. Two by (or “for”) Solomon (Pss. 72, 127)
- D. Moses (Psalm 90)
- E. Asaph (Pss. 50, 73-83 / cf., 1 Chron.6:39 / 15:17, 19), a percussionist (1 Chron.16:5), a seer (2 Chron.29:30)
- F. Sons of Korah (Pss. 42, 44-49, 84-85, 87-88, cf., Num.26:11)
- G. Jeduthun (Pss. 39, 62 and 77 are “to Jeduthun”—cf., 1 Chron.16:41), a trumpeter (1 Chron.16:42), a seer (2 Chron.35:15)
- H. Ethan the Ezrahite (Psalm 89 / cf. 1 Kings 4:31) Possibly the same man as Jeduthun
- I. Heman the Ezrahite (Psalm 88 / cf. 1 Kings 4:31 / 1 Chron.2:6), a singer (1 Chron.6:33), a seer (1 Chron.25:5)

### IV. Various Types of Psalms

- A. Messianic Psalms— Pss.2\*, 8, 16, 22, 23, 24, 40, 41, 45\*, 68, 69, 72\*, 89, 102, 110\*, 118
  - 1. *Titles:* Anointed (2:2); the King (2:6; 45:1); the Melchisedek Priest (110:4); rejected Stone (118:22); “God” (45:6); “my [David’s] Lord” (110:1); the Son (2:7); the Firstborn (89:27)
  - 2. *Themes:* 1) Humiliation and exaltation of Messiah; 2) Future blessing of all nations
- B. Penitential Psalms — Pss. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143
- C. Imprecatory Psalms — Pss. 5, 10, 17, 35, 58, 59, 69, 70, 79, 83, 109, 129, 137, 140
- D. Historical Psalms— Pss. 78, 105-106, 136
- E. Psalms of “Degrees” (*Ma’aloth*) —Pss. 120-134
- F. “The Hallel” (Pss. 113-118) and “The Great Hallel” (Psalm 136)

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\* One of the four great “Kingdom Psalms”

## V. Psalm Titles (or concluding notes? Hab.3:1, 19): Apparently early and authentic

Lacking in 34 Psalms in Hebrew Bible; only 2 Psalms in LXX (counts "Alleluia" as title)

A. Author attributions (see "Authorship" above)

B. Type of song:

*Mizmor* (57 psalms) From the root word "to pluck"

*Shir* (occurs 30 times, sometimes with *mizmor*) "a song"

*Maschil* (13 psalms) a meditative, didactic or skillful song

*Michtam* (6 psalms) meaning is unclear, some say related to "atonement"

*Tephillah* (5 psalms) means "prayer"

*Shiggayon* (only in Psalm 7) meaning is unclear

*Tehillah* (only in Psalm 145) means "praise"

C. Musical notations:

*Lamnatseach* (in 51 psalms and in Hab.3:19) rendered "to the chief musician"

*Selah* (71x in 39 psalms) meaning unknown, may be a musical rest, or change of volume

*Neginoth* (6 psalms, always with *lamnatseach*, and 4x with *mizmor*). Means "stringed instruments"

*Al hashsheminith* (Pss. 6 and 12) meaning unknown

*Al alamoith* (Pss. 46 and 48) related to "stringed instruments", exact meaning unknown

*Nechiloth* (Psalm 5) may mean "with wind instruments" or "on a reed-pipe"

*Mahalath* (Psalm 88) means "sickness" or "grief"

D. "To the tune of..." or "on the occasion of..."

*Al-tashcheth* (in four psalm titles) "Do not destroy" probably based upon Isaiah 65:8)

*Ayyeleth hashachar* (Psalm 22) means "the hind [deer] of the morning" or the dawn

*Gittith* (in 3 psalms) means "winepress" (possibly related to Autumn=Feast of Tabernacles)

*Shoshanim* (Pss. 45 and 69) means "lilies" (possibly related to spring=Passover)

*Shushan 'Eduth* (Pss. 60 and 80) means "an anemone is my testimony"

*Jonath elem rechokim* (Psalm 56) means "the dove of the faraway terebinths"

*Al muth labben* (Psalm 9) "relating to the one coming between" (Goliath? 1 Sam.17:4 *Heb.*)

## VI. Divisions: Five Books

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|-----------------------|---|
| A. Book One 1-41      | Mostly Davidic; uses Yahweh 273x and Elohim 15x     |
| B. Book Two: 42-72    | Mostly Davidic; uses Yahweh 30x and Elohim 164x     |
| C. Book Three: 73-89  | Mostly Asaphian; uses Yahweh 44x and Elohim 43x     |
| D. Book Four: 90-106  | Mostly anonymous; uses Yahweh 103x exclusively      |
| E. Book Five: 107-150 | Davidic & anonymous; uses Yahweh 236x and Elohim 7x |

## VII. Significance for the Christian

- The most-frequently-quoted book in the New Testament
- "Types" of Christ (e.g. Pss. 2, 22, 16, 40, 55)
- Generalities Vs. personal "promises" (e.g., 41:1-3; Ps.91; 128 [contra. Ps.44; 73:3-7; 79:1-4])
- Guide for worship and prayer
  - "Praying through" (e.g., Pss.3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 13, 17, 28, 31, 42, 43, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, etc.)
  - Talking to oneself (e.g., 42:5, 11; 43:5; 103:1)
  - Praying against wickedness (e.g., 5:10; 6:10; 28:4; 31:18; 45:9; 141:10)