

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF PSALMS

* * * THE INSPIRED HYMNAL OF ISRAEL * * *

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Soli Deo Gloria!

AUTHORS: The tabulation below gives the authorship of the Psalms as taken from their inscriptions; note that the Psalms are actually organized as 5 "books" (which have some parallels to the 5 books of the Torah). The inscriptions to the Psalms (which are part of the inspired text of Scripture) indicate that King David authored at least 73 of the 150 Psalms; additionally, some of those that are apparently anonymous are attributed to David elsewhere in the Scripture (e.g., Acts 4:25 attributes Psalm 2 to David). Thus, David likely wrote more than half of the Psalms. However, at least 6 other authors contributed Psalms, while one-third of them are anonymous. All, however, are the inspired words of God recorded by human penmen under the sovereign influence of the Holy Spirit (2Tim3:16; 2Pet1:21).

Author	Book I 1-41	Book II 42-72	Book III 73-89	Book IV 90-106	Book V 107-150	Total
David	37	18	1	2	15	73
Asaph		1	11			12
Sons of Korah		7	3			10
Moses				1		1
Solomon		1			1	2
Heman			1			1
Ethan			1			1
Anonymous	4	4		14	28	50
Total	41	31	17	17	44	150

BACKGROUND: The Psalter has rightly been called *the inspired hymnal of the nation of Israel*. The Psalms were meant to be set to music and sung as a part of corporate worship at the Temple (1Chr25:1-7), and as such the Psalms are actually Hebrew poetry written to be easily remembered. Because this part of God's Word would be most remembered by God's people in the centuries before personal copies of the Scriptures became readily available, it's not surprising that God chose to include some of the most profound and important Biblical truths in this unique portion of Scripture. Much more than merely devotional literature, the Psalms are rich in doctrinal, and especially prophetic, truth.

While many students of the Bible have the notion that the Psalms are primarily devotional literature, with an occasional prophetic nugget to be mined here and there, Dr. Cooper has asserted that the exact opposite view would be nearer the truth. Dr. Unger has observed that of the approximately 100 NT quotations from the Psalms, almost all relate to prophetic issues. Dr. Phillips similarly concluded that "there is probably as much, if not more, clear-cut prophecy in the Psalms as in many of the more obvious prophetic books of the Bible". Finally, the Lord Himself refers to the Psalms as a book of prophecy (Lk24:44). In conclusion, the Book of Psalms is pre-eminently a prophetic volume, though written in the genre of wisdom literature (which often presents truth in an indirect way; cf., Nathan's indirect approach to presenting truth to King David in 2Sam12:1-7).

The Book of Psalms by no means contains all the songs to be found in the Scriptures. Other important songs include the Song of the Redeemed (Ex15:1-21), the Song of Moses (Deut32:1-43), the song of Deborah and Barak (Judg5), the song of Hannah (1Sam2:1-10), the songs of the Book of Revelation (Rev5:9-10,15:3-4), and the greatest of Solomon's 1,005 songs (1Kgs4:32), the Canticle (i.e., Song of Songs).

HEBREW POETRY: Whereas the basis of English poetry is parallelism of sound (i.e., rhymed verse), the basis of Hebrew poetry is parallelism of thought; it consists of the: 1. repetition, 2. contrast, and 3. elaboration of ideas. While the structures that Hebrew parallelism employs can be complex and varied, three forms predominate.

1. *Synonymous parallelism* (i.e., repetition) denotes those forms where the thoughts expressed are essentially the same (e.g., Ps19:2, 24:1-3, 25:4, 32:5; 144:4; Prov1:22-24).
2. *Antithetic parallelism* (i.e., contrast) denotes those forms where contrasting thoughts are presented (e.g., Ps1:6, 20:8; Eccl3:2-8).
3. *Synthetic parallelism* (i.e., elaboration) denotes those forms where a primary thought is developed and enriched by subsequent thoughts (e.g., Num6:24-26; Job11:18; Ps1:3, 19:7-9).

As poetry, the Psalms are rich in figures of speech, including the use of simile (e.g., Ps1:3-4), metaphor (e.g., Ps84:11), hyperbole (e.g., Ps6:6), synecdoche (e.g., Ps52:4), personification (e.g., Ps35:10), apostrophe (e.g., Ps114:5), and many, many others.

CLASSIFICATION OF PSALMS: The Psalms have been categorized by many according to type or genre. Common classifications include:

1. *Psalms of Thanksgiving.* These psalms offer praise and thanksgiving for Jehovah and His works (e.g., Psalms 18, 75, 118).
2. *Lament Psalms.* These psalms are prayers to Jehovah for help in times of need, be it affliction, sickness, slander, war, or other crisis (e.g., Psalms 3, 12, 25).
3. *Imprecatory Psalms.* These psalms call for the deliverance of an individual (often David) or the nation of Israel from its enemies, and usually includes a petition for Jehovah to curse the enemies of Israel according to the promise of Gen12:3 (e.g., 35, 69, 109).
4. *Messianic Psalms.* These are psalms that contain prophecy regarding the Messiah, often speaking of both His suffering and exaltation (i.e., 1st and 2nd comings) within the same passage without distinction (e.g., Psalms 2, 16, 22, 72, 110, 118).
5. *Enthronement Psalms.* These psalms view the sovereign rule of God, often as an earthly King Messiah (e.g., Psalms 93, 95, 98).
6. *Songs of Ascent (or Degrees).* Psalms 120-134 were sung by worshipers coming up to Jerusalem for the required feasts (Deut16:16); 5 were authored by David, and internal evidence suggests that the 10 anonymous Songs of Degrees were likely composed by King Hezekiah (see Isa38:5-8).