

Psalms

Message

The message of the Psalter derived from one common element shared by all of the Psalms is **Praise!** As Ron Allen declares: “*A Psalm is a poem sung as an expression of praise to God.*”¹

Introductory Note

The Psalms hold the central place in the Bible as the heart of both testaments. They begin with God blessing man (Ps 1:1) and end with man blessing God (Ps 150); while in between is to be found every degree of human experience as seen in the light of eternity. *The Psalms are truly the “heart throb” of the Bible!* The Book of Psalms represents a collection of inspired responses of human hearts to God’s revelation of Himself in law, history, and prophecy. Today we tend to pride ourselves in our intellectualism, but our emotions are equally of value. Someone has well said, “to move men to pious trust, *we must shoot our arrows at the heart—not the head!*”² Saints of all ages have appropriated this collection of 150 prayers and praises in their public worship and private meditation.³

Title

In the Hebrew Bible the title of Psalms is *sepher t’hillim*, “Book of Praises” or simply *t’hillim*, “praises or songs.” The title assigned by the Greek translators for the Septuagint version was *psalmoi* meaning “songs to the accompaniment of stringed instruments.” The Greek word *psalmoi* translates the Hebrew word *mizmor*—which occurs in the titles of 57 Psalms—meaning “music accompanied by stringed instruments” (derived from *zamar* “to pluck”). The English title “Psalms” or “Psalter” is a transliteration of *psalmoi* derived from the Greek translation of the Old Testament (see Luke 20:42 and Acts 1:20).

Place in the Canon

In the Hebrew Bible the Psalter appeared as the first book of the third division called the “Writings” (*Kethuvim*) after the Law (*Torah*) and the Prophets (*Nevi'im*). As such, this collection of sacred songs was the inspired book of prayer and praise of the Hebrew people. In the English versions, the Book of Psalms is the second book of the third divis-

¹Ronald Allen, *And I will Praise Him*, 27.

²Author/source unknown (personal note [possibly from a sermon?] in the margin of my Bible).

³Allen P. Ross, “Psalms,” in *BKC*, 779.

ion (following Job) of the fourfold grouping of the books of the Law, history, poetry, and prophets.

Authors

While much of the Book of Psalms is traditionally ascribed to David, it is evident that David did not write all the psalms. The Book of Psalms can best be defined as an anthology, that is, a collection of psalms written between 1450-444 B.C. In this case the works of many poets are included, so one should actually speak of Psalms as a multi-authored production. “Evidence exists that editors collected the individual psalms and arranged them into their present order in the book.”⁴ The texts of fifty of the psalms contain no writer information in their titles and are referred to as anonymous or “orphan psalms.”⁵ The superscriptions attached to many of the psalms provide information detailing the authors and the circumstances surrounding composition. The authorship of at least seventy-three (73) psalms are credited to David, with the New Testament ascribing two more to his prolific pen; these would be Psalm 2, according to Acts 4:5, and Psalm 95, according to Hebrews 4:7.⁶ The following chart provides a classification of various psalms according to the human authors, as designated in the superscriptions (six additional authors are identified besides David):

Author	Number	Psalms Written
David	73	3-9; 11-32; 34-41; 51-65; 68-70; 86; 101; 103; 108-110; 122; 124; 131; 133; 138-45
Asaph	12	50; 73-83
Sons of Korah	11	42; 44-49; 84-85; 87; [88] ⁷
Solomon	2	72; 127
Heman	1	88
Ethan	1	89
Moses	1	90
Anonymous ⁴⁹		All other psalms

Individual Titles

The majority of the Psalms have titles prefixed to them (134 in the Hebrew text and

⁴Gene Merrill, “Psalms,” in *Old Testament Explorer*, 403. For a good discussion see Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, Society of Biblical Literature: Dissertation Series 76 (Chico: Scholars Press, 1954); and for a more concise treatment refer to Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 278-281.

⁵Psalm 72:20 seems to be an exception, but this verse was probably an early editorial addition referring to the preceding collection of Davidic psalms of which Psalm 72 was the last one. See Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 439.

⁶Roy B. Zuck, class handout on “The Book of Psalms.”

⁷Psalm 88 is ascribed to both the sons of Korah and Heman.

148 in the Greek translation, including the word “Hallelujah” as a title for several. These titles, to be listed below, are not considered a part of the original text of the Hebrew Bible. However, they do pre-date the *LXX* Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. The following seven titles are used, which refer primarily to how a Psalm was generally used:

Title	Times	General Usage
Mizmor	57	A song accompanied by stringed instruments
Shir	30	Any song of a sacred or secular nature
Maskil	13	A meditative, didactic, or skillful psalm
Mikhtam	6	Uncertain meaning, perhaps “atoning”
Tephillah	5	A prayer
Tehillah	1	A song of praise. From this Hebrew word <i>t^ehillim</i> came the title of the Psalter, “Praises”
Shiggayon	1	Uncertain, perhaps a penitential psalm

Dates of Composition

On the basis of authorship and historical notations included in some of the psalms’ superscriptions, it may be concluded that the time of the Psalms’ composition extends over a period of approximately a thousand years, from about 1450 B.C., when Moses wrote Psalm 90, up until 444 B.C. when Ezra returned from exile and completed the canon, and according to the Septuagint, added Psalms 1 and 119 to the collection. The greater number of Psalms cluster around two prominent periods in Israel’s monarchy—the reign of King David and the reign of King Hezekiah. The following chart provides a suggested overview of the proposed date of the various psalms’ composition:

Scope of the Psalms’ Composition					
1450 B.C.	1000	971	931	722	450 B.C.
Moses	David	Solomon	Divided Kingdom	Exile	Restoration Period
Ps 90	Most Psalms Written Here			Ps 137	Ps 126
<u>Structure of the Psalter</u>					

Two separate matters must be considered when attempting to determine the structure of the Book of Psalms in its present form. They are the history behind the *Psalters*’ compilation and collection, and the editorial arrangement of the Book of Psalms.

The History of the Psalters' Compilation and Collection. The history of the Psalters' compilation is unsure, although it appears to have begun as a process of collecting individual psalms that were then selected and used in association with Israel's temple worship. It is quite clear that the final collection of 150 Psalms was reached only after a lengthy process in which several smaller collections were brought together. An example of editorial arrangement of a portion of the Psalms is reflected in the words concluding Book Two, Psalm 72:20: "The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended." These words imply editorial arrangement of the Psalms. The notation in 2 Chronicles 29:30, that "Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praises to the Lord with the words of David and of Asaph the seer" also suggests that these two collections ("the words/ Psalms of David" and the words/Psalms of Asaph the seer") existed in Hezekiah's day.⁸ At some point the separate collections were then assembled into Israel's hymn book.

*The Arrangement of the Book of Psalms.*⁹ Although the Psalms comprise one book with an order and unity all its own, the Psalter has been divided into five books, each ending in a doxology of praise to God, with Psalm 150 providing a grand doxology for the whole collection. The earliest evidence of the five-fold division of the Book of Psalms comes from the poorly preserved fragment of the Qumran scroll 1Q30, dating to the turn of the Christian Era. Undoubtedly the Psalter was in its final form by the close of the Old Testament canon, namely by 400 B.C.

A breakdown of the five books is provided according to the following arrangement:

Book I	Psalms 1–41
Book II	Psalms 42–72
Book III	Psalms 73–89
Book IV	Psalms 90–106
Book V	Psalms 107–150

The following chart depicts the parallels that exist between the five books of Moses and the five books of David (i.e., the Psalms).

⁸Several early stages in the compilation of the Psalter are readily evident: two early collections of Psalms were the psalms of Asaph (Psalms 73-83) and the psalms attributed to the sons of Korah (Psalms 42; 44-49). Another group was that of the "Songs of Ascent" (Psalms 120-124). See Duane L. Christensen, "The Book of Psalms within the Canonical Process in Ancient Israel," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39:3 (September 1996):421-32.

⁹See the chart at the end of these notes, which provides an overview of the Book of Psalms. This chart is adapted from Irving L. Jensen, *Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1978), 280.

Five-fold Division of the Book of Psalms

1 - 41	42 - 72	73 - 89	90 - 106	107 - 150
I	II	III	IV	V
(Gen)	(Ex)	(Lev)	(Num)	(Deut)

Each of the 5 sections ends with a concluding doxology of Praise to God!

I. 41:13

II. 72:19

III. 89:52

IV. 106:48

V. 146-150- Five joyous

and ends

"Hymns of Praise" close the Psalter, each

(inclusio)

with Hallelujah = "Praise the Lord!"

begins

Various explanation have been advanced to explain this "fivefold division." Several of the more popular explanations that have been proposed are the following:

1. The basis of this division is the doxologies found at the end of each section (1–41; 42–72; 73–89; 90–106; 107–150).
2. Some writers on the Psalms believe that this five-fold arrangement of the Psalms parallels the pentateuchal arrangement of the Pentateuch (five books) of Moses, the Torah. Jewish Midrash claims that Moses gave to the Israelites the five books of the Torah, and to coordinate therewith, David gave them the five books of the Psalms. However, R. K. Harrison points out "That although this correlation is popular, no real striking correspondence can be traced between the Psalms and the Pentateuch."¹⁰
3. Gerald Wilson suggest that psalms were arranged around particular "seam" psalms in books 1-3 and around thematic developments in books 4-5, focusing primarily on progressive thoughts associated with kingship and the Davidic covenant.¹¹
4. Hill and Walton maintain that the groupings follow Israel's history from the time of David to the return from the Exile.¹²

¹⁰R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 986-87.

¹¹Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, 1.5.

¹²Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 278-281; also see John H. Walton, "Psalms: A Cantata About the Davidic Covenant," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34-1 (March 1991): 21-31.

Classification of the Psalms

The Psalms have been categorized/classified in many different ways depending on the content and setting of each psalm. Below are several of the more popular classification:

A. Leopold Sabourin's Classification¹³

1. Hymns of Praise (31 Psalms).

This would include hymns containing words like "Amen" and "Hallelujah," and enthronement Psalms and Songs of Zion (such as Pss 46, 48, 76, 84, 122, 132) which extol Zion.

2. Individual Laments, Expressions of Confidence in God, or Thanksgiving (58 Psalms).

The characteristics of these Psalms consist of the following:

- a. Address to God and cry for help.
- b. Complaint often expressed in figures.
- c. Confession of trust.
- d. Petition for the Lord's help.
- e. Appeal to God's special care or covenant promise.
- f. Vow of praise and thanksgiving.
- g. Confidence of God's answer.

3. Community Laments, Confidences, or Thanksgiving (27 Psalms).

The characteristics are similar to those recorded in number 2 above except that they are now expressed in the setting of the Israelite community.

4. Royal [or Messianic] Psalms (11 Psalms)

This includes Psalms dealing with the royal marriage (Ps 45); Coronation (Pss 2, 72, 101, 110); and Battle songs of prayer for deliverance or praise for victory in battle (Pss 18, 20-21, 89, 144).

5. Instruction or Didactic Psalms (23 Psalms)

These would include Wisdom Psalms; Liturgical Psalms; and Psalms with historical settings and prophetic exhortations.

B. Claus Westermann's Classification¹⁴

1. Laments (or Complaints) and Petitions of Individuals.
2. Laments (or Complaints) and Petitions of the People.
3. Declarative Praise of Individuals (Songs of Thanksgiving).

¹³Adapted from Leopold Sabourin, *The Psalms: Their Origin and Meaning* (New York: Alba House, 1974), 194.

¹⁴Claus Westermann, *The Praise of God in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1965), 156-57.

4. Declarative Praise of the People (Songs of Thanksgiving).
5. Descriptive Praise of the People.
6. Didactic Psalms.
7. Miscellaneous Groupings—including creation psalms; penitential psalms, Messianic psalms, imprecatory psalms, songs of ascent, and alphabetic (acrostic) psalms.

C. Brueggemann's Classification¹⁵

His classification is quite unique in that he places all the psalms in one of three categories:¹⁶

1. Psalms of Orientation (blessing leading to gratitude).
2. Psalms of Disorientation (suffering to lament)
3. Psalms of New Orientation (rescue leading to joy)

D. Classification According to Types

As can be seen from the three examples above, there are a variety of ways to classify the Psalms. Another method of grouping the Psalms can be made according to types. That is, when psalms are classified according to subject matter and attitude of writing, many types emerge. Consider the following types proposed by Roy Zuck:¹⁷

1. *Creation or Nature psalms*: 8, 19, 29, 33, 104, 148
2. *Penitential psalms*: 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143
3. *Imprecatory psalms*: 9, 10, 31, 35, 55, 58, 59, 69–71, 79, 83, 94, 109, 129, 139, 140
4. *Lament (Complaint) psalms*: 3-7, 10, 12, 13, 17, 22, 25–28, 31, 35, 38, 39, 40:11-17, 41–43, 51, 53–57, 59, 61, 64, 69–71, 77, 86, 88, 89, 102, 108, 109, 120, 130, 140–144
5. *Royal psalms*: 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132, 144
6. *Messianic psalms*: 2, 8, 16, 22, 40, 45, 69, 72, 89, 96, 97, 98, 102, 109, 110, 118, 132
7. *Lord of History psalms*: 33, 103, 113, 117, 145, 146, 149
8. *Pilgrim psalms or Songs of Ascent*: 120–134
9. *Alphabetical (Acrostic) psalms*: 9–10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145
10. *Didactic (Teaching) psalms*: 1, 5, 7, 15, 17, 50, 73, 94, 101
11. *Hallelujah psalms*: 106, 111–113, 115–117, 135, 146–150

¹⁵Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984).

¹⁶See the example of Brueggemann's classifications provided in *Appendix B* at the end of these notes on Psalms.

¹⁷Adapted from Roy B. Zuck, class handout on "The Book of Psalms," 10-12.

Literary Features
of Hebrew Poetry
Employed in the Psalms

Hebrew poetry, unlike English poetry¹⁸ which is characterized by rhyme (similar sounds at the ends of lines) and meter (rhythm or cadence determined by the number of syllables per line), *has neither of these features*.¹⁹ Bishop Lowth is credited with being the first to enunciate the basic elements of Hebrew poetry.²⁰ The primary vehicle for conveying rhythm of thought in biblical poetry is a feature described as parallelism of members. Concerning the nature of Hebrew parallelism, Ronald B. Allen writes:

Parallelism is one statement followed by another, done with art, style, and image. That is, by saying the same thing in slightly different words, the total impression is enhanced beyond saying either line alone.

Parallelism in Hebrew poetry may be compared to a stereophonic music system. In fact, a better word for our day than parallelism may be *stereo-metrics*.²¹ As one listens to a stereo recording he receives from the two speakers together a 'living' sensation of the sound. So the ancient [Hebrew] poets by using two channels, as it were, communicate in brilliantly living sound.²²

Hill and Walton have noted that while parallelism served as "A pervasive mode of thought in ancient Near Eastern literary circles, this parallelism was elevated with exceptional artistry by the Hebrew poets."²³

Although Hebrew parallelism is beyond absolute and rigid principles of categorization, the following features have been suggested:²⁴

1. Rhythm of Thought.

¹⁸See "Jake's Prayer," an American poem **included simply for your amusement!**

¹⁹Leyland Ryken, commenting on the artistic form employed by poetry, states that, "Poetry . . . is the interpretive presentation of human experience in an artistic form. It differs from other literary types by being a more consciously artistic object than other types. Concentration is achieved through the use of images, symbols, illusions, metaphors, simile, emotive vocabulary, and multiple meanings. As a work of artistry, it includes pattern or design, theme or centrality, balance, harmony, contrast, unified progression, recurrence, and variation (*The Literature of the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974], 121).

²⁰Ronald B. Allen, *And I will Praise Him*, rev and expanded edition (Nashville: Nelson, 1992), 51.

²¹Concerning this term, *stereometrics* (*italics his*), Allen writes, "I first discovered this happy word in Gerhard von Rad's *Wisdom in Israel*, trans. James D. Martin (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), p. 27, note 5 (quoting B. Landsberger). Von Rad says of this phenomenon that 'it offers the poet virtually inexhaustible possibilities of inflection of poetic thought' (p. 27). When Landsberger used the word his model was visual stereometry; I have opted for stereophonics for my model" (Ronald B. Allen, *And I will Praise Him*, 51).

²²*Ibid.*

²³Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 252.

²⁴The following have been taken primarily from Hill and Walton, *Survey of the OT*, 253-254 and Ronald B. Allen, *And I will Praise Him*, 50-54. See also Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 1-4; R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the OT*, 965-972; Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 180-185.

- a. ***Synonymous parallelism*** (the most widely used) attempts to provide an exact balance between the thoughts or meanings in two lines of poetry by saying the same thing twice in nearly the same way (Pss 2:1; 3:1; 7:16; 2:4). For example:

Why are the nations in an uproar,
And the peoples devising a vain thing? (2:1).

O LORD, how my adversaries have increased!
Many are rising up against me (3:1).

- b. ***Antithetical parallelism*** provides an exact balancing of thoughts or meanings in two lines of poetry by stating essentially the same thing twice in each line. This is accomplished, not by repetition of a similar thought, but by the denial of the opposite (Pss 1:6; 40:4; 57:6). Note the following examples:

For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
But the way of the wicked will perish (1:6).

How blessed is the man
who has made the LORD his trust,
And has not turned to the proud,
nor to those who lapse into falsehood (40:4).

- c. ***Climatic parallelism*** further takes up and develops a thought begun in the first line by adding a little more to enrich one's thinking (Pss 29:1; 93:3; 96:7). Consider the following examples:

Ascribe to the LORD, O sons of the mighty,
Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength (29:1).

Occasionally the expansion is expressed in a tiered structure in which each line repeats the first with the exception of the last term/phrase where a new one is added.

*The seas have lifted up, O LORD,
the seas have lifted up their voice;
the seas have lifted up their pounding waves (93:3).*

- d. ***Synthetic parallelism*** is very similar to the previous, climatic parallelism, in that the second line develops or completes the idea expressed in the first line. In fact, one of the lines (usually the second) does not make good sense if it is read alone (7:10; 13:6; 95:3; 95:6). Here are a couple of examples:

My shield is God Most High,
who saves the upright in heart (7:10).

For the LORD is a great God,
And a great King above all gods (95:3).

- e. **Emblematic parallelism** uses images to convey the poetic meaning. While one line conveys the main point in a direct fashion, the second line illuminates it by an image. There is a movement from point to picture (Pss 23:1, 2, 4; 42:1; 103:13; 113:5, 6; 57:1). The following Psalm provides a classic example:

As the deer pants for the water brooks,
So my soul pants for Thee, O God (42:1).

- f. **Chiastic or Inverted parallelism** contraposes or alternates the words or phrases in consecutive lines (Ps 51:3; Isa 11:13)

a. For I know
b. My transgressions,
b'. And my sin
a'. Is ever before me (51:3).

- g. **Nonparallelism (Formal)** is present when the second line continues the sentence but provides no parallel thought (2:6; 8:1; 25:22; 109:1; 119:89). For example:

I have installed my King on Zion my holy hill (2:6).	Redeem Israel, O God, from all their troubles (25:22).
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2. Rhythm of Sound

- a. **Acrostic Poems** are written so that the initial letters of consecutive lines form an alphabet, word, or phrase (Pss 9; 10; 25; 34; 37; 111; 112; 119; 145; Prov 31:10-31; Lam 1; 2; 3; 4; Nahum 1:2-20). This was a *mnemonic tool* (memory device) used to convey ideas of order, progression, and completeness.
- b. **Alliteration** is the consonance of sounds at the beginning of words or syllables (Ps 122:6).
- c. **Assonance** is the rhythm of sound using correspondence of vowels sounds, often at the end of words in order to emphasize an idea, theme, or tone for the poem (Ps 119:29).
- d. **Paronomasia** is a word play through the repetition of words of similar sound, but not necessarily meaning in order to heighten the impact of the message (Gen 32:22-24).
- e. **Onomatopoeia** is the use of words that sound like what they describe (Ruth 1:19).
- f. **Ellipsis** is the omission of a word or words that would complete a given parallel construction (Ps. 115:4-7).
- g. **Inclusio** is the repetition of words or phrases by which the poet returns to the point from which he began (Ps 118:1, 29).

3. Figures of Speech²⁵

- a. *Simile*: An explicit comparison, using **like** or **as**, between two normally different things that have something in common.

He is **like** a tree planted by the streams of water (Ps 1:3).

Your tongue is **like** a sharpened razor (Ps 52:2).

- b. *Metaphor*: An implied comparison, using **is** or **are**, between two normally different things that have something in common.

The LORD **is** my rock (Ps 18:2).

For the LORD **is** a sun and a shield (Ps 84:11).

- c. *Hypocatastasis*: Directly naming someone by another name to imply a comparison.

Dogs have surrounded me (Ps 22:16).

- d. *Hyperbole*: An overstatement for effect.

All night long I flood my bed with weeping (Ps 6:6).

My sins . . . are more than the hairs of my head (Ps 40:12).

- e. *Personification*: Applying a human characteristic or action to a non-human object.

The sea looked and fled (Ps 114:3).

The waters saw you, O God (Ps 77:16).

- f. *Apostrophe*: Addressing someone or something absent as if it were present.

Why was it, O sea, that you fled? (Ps 114:5).

- g. *Merism*: Using two opposite extremes to express the whole.

You know when I sit and when I rise (Ps 139:2).

- h. *Anthropomorphism*: Ascribing a human characteristic or action to God.

The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous (Ps 34:15).

Do not hide your face from me (Ps 102:2).

- i. *Zoomorphism*: Ascribing to God some part of an animal.

Hide me in the shadow of your wings (Ps 17:8).

- j. *Synecdoche*: Stating a part which stands for the whole.

Your tongue plots destruction (Ps 52:2).

The arrow that flies by day (Ps 91:5).

²⁵Adapted from Roy B. Zuck, class handout on "The Book of Psalms," 10-12.

Graham Scroggie provides a marvelous summation on how the poetry used in the writing of the various psalms abounds in a nearly limitless supply of poetic imagery:

Imagery and similes are drawn from all quarters in the Psalter. Here are the everlasting hills, the rushing torrents, the roar of thunder, the desolating hail, the storm-tossed ocean, the sheltering rock, the fruitful fields, the fearsome valley, the hunter's trap, the passing ship, the dazzling snow, the refreshing cup, the glowing stars, the midday sun, the passing shadow, the roaring lion, the subtle unicorn, the fleeing dove, the timid sheep, the horned unicorn, the worrying dog, the hind and the stag, the buffalo and the bull, the horse and the mule, the worm and the moth, the locust and the bee, the crocodile and the dragon, the sparrow and the eagle, the bottle in the smoke, the purified silver, the holy oil, the burning sacrifice, the sacred House, the forbidding desert, the narrow cliff, the slipping foot, the concealed pit, the shepherd's club, the bow and arrow, the sword and spear, the tower and fortress, the shield and buckler, the wealthy mines, the withered grass, the scattered seed, the driven chaff, the olive and the vine, the prince, the slave, the razor, the crown: and scores of other facts and figures are laid under contribution by these Hebrew poets.²⁶

4. Forms of Wisdom²⁷

- a. *The Parable* is a "warning speech" (Prov 6:20-35; 2 Sam 12:1-4).
- b. *The Precept* is an authoritative instruction or regulation for behavior connecting wisdom with the moral codes of the Law (Prov 3:27).
- c. *The Riddle* is a puzzling question stated as a problem calling for mental acumen to solve it (Judg 14:14).
- d. *The Fable* is a brief tale embracing a moral truth using people, animals, or inanimate objects as characters (Judg 9:7-20).
- e. *The Wise Saying* is a generalization about the way of wisdom based on the insight of experience or a folk expression of plain common sense (Prov 18:18).
- f. *The Numerical Proverb* culminates numerical progression (Prov 6:16-19; 30:18-31).
- g. Rhetorical Questions (Prov 5:16; 8:1).
- h. *Allegory Through Personification* (Prov 8-9; Eccl 12:1-8), Satire and Irony (Prov 11:22; Eccl 5:13-17)

Purposes of the
Book of Psalms

First and foremost the Psalter is a collection of 150 individually inspired psalms intended for use primarily in association with “spiritual worship.” Several purposes can be discerned from this massive collection of Spirit inspired Psalms. For the children of Israel, the Psalms provided them with the ability to express their praise for the providential manifestation of God’s interest in them as His chosen and covenanted people. In addition, the Psalms provide a rich source of spiritual and religious experience. Luther called the book “a small Bible,” and declared that there never could be a more precious book of examples and legends of saints than provided in the Psalter. Ambrose wrote concerning the Psalms:

Although all Scripture breathes the grace of God, yet sweet beyond all others is the book of Psalms. History instructs, the Law teaches, Prophecy announces, rebukes, chastens, and Morality persuades; but in the book of Psalms we have the fruit of all these, and a kind of medicine for the salvation of men.”

John Calvin described the Psalter as:

An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul, for there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. Or rather, the Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated.”²⁸

Additional purposes have been advanced for the Psalms:

1. To serve as Israel’s hymnbook for many rituals and functions such as religious festivals, temple worship, and local and national gatherings.
2. To reveal the character of God through the praise, complaint, and exhortation of God’s people so that the reader may be willing to submit himself to the LORD.
3. To encourage one’s confidence in God’s faithfulness by the words of others when one’s own life experiences do not seem to support that faith.
4. To express heartfelt responses to God as His people experienced the innumerable joys, sorrows, and trials of life.
5. To express the divine word spoken in rather than to man.
6. To encourage believers to enjoy God and His many benefits.
7. To voice the yearnings of the people for the coming of the Messiah, expressed by many prophetic details of His first and second coming.
8. To affirm the certainty of God’s future rule on earth through the line of David wherein the righteous will be blessed and the wicked will be judged.

²⁶Graham Scroggie, *The Psalms*, 4 vols. (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1948), 1:26-27.

²⁷Hill and Walton, *Survey of the OT*, 257-258; Ryken, *Words of Delight*, 159-185, 313-340.

²⁸John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, xxxvii..

Outline

- I. **Book 1: chaps. 1–41**
- II. **Book 2: chaps. 42–72**
- III. **Book 3: chaps. 73–89**
- IV. **Book 4: chaps. 90–106**
- V. **Book 5: chaps. 107–150**

Argument

Since the Book of Psalms is a collection of 150 individual psalms/hymns of praise, the concept of an “argument” for the Psalter is somewhat of a misnomer. However, it seems that the argument of the Psalter concerns man’s worship of God. “The *form* is music (in poetry), and the *substance* is praise.”²⁹ The most dominant feature of the Psalms is Praise. The last five Psalms (145-50) provide an appropriate climax to the entire collection, and are generally referred to as “The Great Hallel” or “The Hallelujah Chorus.”³⁰ **“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord” (Ps 150:6)**

Classification and Message of the Individual Psalms

Book I (Psalms 1–41)

Classification	Content/Message
1. Wisdom Psalm	The Two Ways of Life: Wise and Foolish (1:1-6)
2. Messianic/Royal Psalm	God and His Anointed (2:1-12)
3. Individual Lament	Prayer for Deliverance (3:1-8)
4. Psalm of Trust	Confidence in the LORD (4:1-8)
5. Individual Lament	Alienation and Acceptance (5:1-12)
6. Individual Lament	Sickness and Suffering (6:1-10)
7. Individual Lament	Persecution of the Innocent (7:1-17)
8. Messianic/Royal Psalm	The Majesty of God (8:1-9)
9-10. National Laments	The Judgment of God (9:1–10:18)
11. Psalm of Trust	The LORD as Refuge (11:1-7)
12. National Lament	Vileness Exalted (12:1-8)
13. Individual Lament	A Cry for Deliverance (13:1-6)
14. National Lament	A Cynical and Unrighteous Age (14:1-7)
15. Liturgy of Entrance	Sojourning in the House of God (15:1-5)
16. Messianic/Royal Psalm	God’s Power to Save (16:1-11)
17. Individual Lament	A Just Cause (17:1-15)
18. Royal Psalm	Royal Thanksgiving (18:1-50)

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Irving L. Jensen, *Jensen’s Survey of the Old Testament*, 279.

19.	Hymn	Glory of God (19:1-14)
20.	Royal Psalm	Prayer for Royal Victory (20:1-9)
21.	Royal Psalm	Thanksgiving for Royal Victory (21:1-13)
22.	Messianic/Royal Psalm	Dereliction and Deliverance (22:1-31)
23.	Psalm of Trusts	God as Shepherd and Host (23:1-6)
24.	Liturgy of Entrance	In the Presence of the King of Glory (24:1-10)
25.	Individual Lament	Dread of Shame (25:1-22)
26.	Individual Lament	Plea of Innocence (26:1-12)
27.	Psalm of Trust	Conquest of Fear (27:1-14)
28.	Individual Lament	Silence of God (28:1-9)
29.	Hymns	Divine Might and Glory (29:1-11)
30.	Psalm of Thanksgiving	Deliverance from Sheol (30:1-12)
31.	Individual Lament	Deliverance from Enemies (31:1-24)
32.	Wisdom Psalm	Fruits of Repentance (32:1-11)
33.	Hymn	Creator and LORD (33:1-22)
34.	Psalm of Thanksgiving and Wisdom	Deliverance from Trouble (34:1-22)
35.	Individual Lament	Plea for Vindication (35:1-28)
36.	Individual Lament	Arrogance of the Wicked (36:1-12)
37.	Wisdom Psalm	Trust vs. Envy (37:1-40)
	Classification	Content/Message
38.	Individual Lament	Plea for God's Help (38:1-22)
39.	Individual Lament	Cry for Deliverance (39:1-13)
40.	Messianic/Royal Psalm	Supplication Regarding Past Deliverance (40:1-17)
41.	Psalm of Thanksgiving	Integrity Sustained (41:1-13)

Book II (Psalms 42-72)

42-43.	Individual Lament	Yearning for God (42:1-43:5)
44.	National Lament	Sheep for Slaughter (44:1-26)
45.	Messianic/Royal Psalm	Royal Marriage (45:1-17)
46.	Hymn	Song of Zion (46:1-11)
47.	Hymn	Enthronement of Yahweh (47:1-10)
48.	Hymn	Song of Zion (48:1-14)
49.	Wisdom Psalm	Vanity of Wealth (49:1-20)
50.	Warning of Divine Judgment	Unrighteous Worship (50:1-23)
51.	Individual Lament	Repentance and Cleansing (51:1-19)
52.	Individual Lament	Condemnation of the Wicked (52:1-9)
53.	Individual Lament	Fate of the Ungodly (53:1-6)
54.	Individual Lament	Ringed by Foes (54:1-7)
55.	Individual Lament	The Treacherous Friend (55:1-23)
56.	Individual Lament	Trampled and Oppressed (56:1-13)
57.	Individual Lament	Storms of Destruction (57:1-11)
58.	National Lament	Judgment of the Wicked (58:1-11)

59.	Individual Lament	Deliverance from Enemies (59:1-17)
60.	National Lament	A Nation Rejected (60:1-12)
61.	Individual Lament	A Soul in Distress (61:1-8)
62.	Psalm of Trust	Divine Dispensation of Salvation (62:1-12)
63.	Individual Lament	A Thirsty Soul (63:1-11)
64.	Individual Lament	Preservation from Evildoers (64:1-10)
65.	Psalm of Thanksgiving	Divine Power and Bounty (65:1-13)
66.	Hymn	What God Has Done (66:1-20)
67.	Psalm of Thanksgiving	Divine Blessing (67:1-7)
68.	Liturgy of Divine Encounter	The Advent of God (68:1-35)
69.	Messianic/Royal Psalm	Overwhelmed Piety (69:1-36)
70.	Individual Lament	Appeal for Help (70:1-5)
71.	Individual Lament	Distress of the Aged (71:1-24)
72.	Messianic/Royal Psalm	A Coronation Hymn (72:1-20)

Book III (Psalms 73-89)

	Classification	Content/Message
73.	Wisdom Psalm	The Justice of God (73:1-28)
74.	National Lament	Destruction of the Temple (74:1-23)
75.	Psalm of Thanksgiving	God's Mighty Acts (75:1-10)
76.	Hymn	Song of Zion (76:1-12)
77.	Individual Lament	The Day of Trouble (77:1-20)
78.	Liturgy of God's Mighty Acts	God's Glorious Deeds and Israel's Unfaithfulness (78:1-72)
79.	National Lament	Desecration of the Sanctuary (79:1-13)
80.	National Lament	Divine Anger (80:1-19)
81.	Liturgy of Divine Judgment	Festal Prophecy (81:1-16)
82.	Liturgy of Divine Judgment	Heavenly Judgment (82:1-8)
83.	National Lament	Silence of God (83:1-18)
84.	Hymn	Song of Zion (84:1-12)
85.	Liturgy and National Lament	Present Anger of God (85:1-13)
86.	Individual Lament	Dilemma of the Godly (86:1-17)
87.	Hymn	Song of Zion (87:1-7)
88.	Individual Lament	A Soul Full of Troubles (88:1-18)
89.	Messianic/Royal Psalm	Lament over a Royal Dilemma (89:1-52)

Book IV (Psalms 90-106)

90.	National Lament	Man's Transience (90:1-17)
91.	Liturgy	Oracle of Divine Protection (91:1-16)
92.	Psalm of Thanksgiving	Greatness of Divine Works (92:1-15)

93.	Hymn	Enthronement of Yahweh (93:1-5)
94.	National Lament	Exultation of the Wicked (94:1-23)
95.	Liturgy of Divine Judgment	Lesson from Tradition (95:1-11)
96.	Hymn	Enthronement of Yahweh (96:1-13)
97.	Hymn	Enthronement of Yahweh (97:1-12)
98.	Hymn	Enthronement of Yahweh (98:1-9)
99.	Hymn	Enthronement of Yahweh (99:1-9)
100.	Liturgy of Entrance	Rejoicing in God (100:1-5)
101.	Royal Psalm	Royal Responsibilities (101:1-8)
102.	Individual Lament	Exile and Illness (102:1-28)
103.	Psalm of Thanksgiving	Bless the LORD (103:1-22)
104.	Hymn	Wonders of Creation and Creator (104:1-35)
105.	Liturgy of God's Mighty Acts	Covenant (105:1-45)
106.	Liturgy of God's Mighty Acts	Contrasting Sin of Israel (106:1-48)

Book V (Psalms 107–150)

	Classification	Content/Message
107.	Psalm of Thanksgiving	Salvation and Lordship (107:1-43)
108.	National Lament	Divine Rejection (108:1-13)
109.	Individual Lament	Words of Hate (109:1-31)
110.	Messianic/Royal Psalm	Priest-King (110:1-7)
111.	Hymn	The Great Works of Yahweh (111:1-10)
112.	Wisdom Psalm	Blessings of Wisdom (112:1-10)
113.	Hymn	God as Champion of the Humble (113:1-9)
114.	Liturgy of God's Mighty Acts	Exodus and Conquest (114:1-8)
115.	Liturgy of Praises	The LORD of Heaven (115:1-18)
116.	Psalm of Thanksgiving	God Hears (116:1-19)
117.	Hymn	Steadfast Love and Faithfulness of God (117:1-2)
118.	Messianic/Royal Psalm	Deliverance in Battle (118:1-29)
119.	Wisdom Psalm	Veneration of the Law of God (119:1-176)
120.	Individual Lament	Lying Lips (120:1-7)
121.	Liturgy of Praises	Help from the LORD (121:1-8)
122.	Hymn	Song of Zion (122:1-9)
123.	National Lament	Contempt of the Proud (123:1-4)
124.	Psalm of Thanksgivings	Deliverance of Israel (124:1-8)
125.	Psalm of Trusts	The LORD is Round About (125:1-5)
126.	National Laments	"Restore Zion's Fortunes" (126:1-6)
127.	Wisdom Psalms	Vain Living (127:1-5)
128.	Wisdom Psalms	Domestic Blessings (128:1-6)
129.	National Laments	Affliction of Israel (129:1-8)
130.	Individual Lament	A Cry from the Depths (130:1-8)
131.	Psalm of Trust	Humble Submission (131:1-3)

132.	Messianic/Royal Psalm	Election of the House of David (132:1-18)
133.	Wisdom Psalm	Brotherly Unity (133:1-3)
134.	Liturgy of Praise	“Bless the LORD” (134:1-3)
135.	Liturgy of God’s Mighty Acts	LORD over All (135:1-21)
136.	Liturgy of God’s Mighty Acts	Steadfast Love of God (136:1-26)
137.	National Lament	Song of Exile (137:1-9)
138.	Psalm of Thanksgiving	Divine Presence (138:1-8)
139.	Individual Lament	Malicious Men (139:1-24)
140.	Individual Lament	Evil Men (140:1-13)
141.	Individual Lament	Wicked Deeds (141:1-10)
142.	Individual Lament	No Refuge (142:1-7)
143.	Individual Lament	Deliverance from Enemies (143:1-12)
144.	Royal Psalm	Divine Help in Battle (144:1-15)
145.	Hymn	The Character of God (145:1-21)
	Classification	Content/Message
146.	Hymn	Hope and Help from the Liberator (146:1-10)
147.	Hymn	Gracious and Mighty God (147:1-20)
148.	Hymn	Creation’s Praise of the Creator (148:1-14)
149.	Hymn	Glad in Israel’s Maker (149:1-9)
150.	Hymn	Hallelujah, Praise the LORD (150:1-6)