

# Old Testament Survey

## The Book of Psalms

### ***The Title of Psalms***

Hebrew - *Tehillim* or "Praise Songs."

Greek - *Psalmoi* or "songs to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument."

English - Psalms or "songs."

### ***The Division of Psalms***

From ancient times Psalms has been divided into five books, each ending with a doxology. Some think that this division follows the pattern of the Pentateuch.

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

### ***Date and Authorship***

1. The text of the Psalms themselves, with the exception of Psalm 72, do not indicate the identity of their author.
2. Clues to the identity of the authors come from the titles of the Psalms. Not all Psalms have the author's name, but those that do give us the following authors:

David	73 Psalms, mainly in Book I and II.
Moses	1 Psalm (90)
Asaph	12 Psalms (50, 70-83)
Korah's descendents	10 Psalms (42, 44-49, 84, 87-88)
Solomon	2 Psalms (72, 127)
Heman the Ezrahite	1 Psalm (88)
Ethan the Ezrahite	1 Psalm (89)
3. The earliest Psalm would most likely be Psalm 90, written by Moses. Davidic Psalms would have been written around the year 1000 B.C., and some of the later Psalms were written after the exile (Psalm 126, 137).
4. No evidence would tell us that any Psalm was written after 500 B.C.

### ***Authorship of the Davidic Psalms***

Rationalists take a very skeptical view of the authorship of the Psalms, and in most cases completely disregard the titles of the Psalms when it comes to determining authorship. Some arguments against Davidic authorship include the following:

1. Some of the Psalms are written from the perspective of the third person and not the first person. This would be a proof against the personal authorship by David.

*True. However it is common for literature in David's time to be written from the perspective of the third person. In fact, Jehovah often speaks of himself in the third person in the Old Testament (see the Decalogue as an example.)*

2. Some of the Psalms supposedly written by David (5, 27, 28, 63, 68, 69, 101, 138) refer to the temple as already having been built, something that is an impossibility since it was Solomon who built the temple.

*This argument rests upon a false understanding of the phrases house of Jehovah, the sanctuary, and the temple. Sanctuary was used to refer to the tabernacle in Exodus 28:43, the house of the Lord was used to refer to the tabernacle in Joshua 6:24, the house of God was used to refer to the tabernacle in Judges 18:31, and the temple was used to refer to the tabernacle in 1 Samuel 1:9, 3:3. There is no proof that these terms must refer to the Solomonic Temple. In fact, in Psalms 27 the tabernacle is referred to as the house of Jehovah, sukkah (booth) and ohel (tent)*

3. Some objections are raised about Aramaisms in some of the Psalms which would point to a period of writing much later than that of David.

*This really is no proof since David had significant contact with Aramaic-speaking people and since there are so few examples. If anything, the lack of more Aramaisms tends to prove an earlier as opposed to later authorship.*

4. Some say that the historical David would have never found time to write poetry since he was a king nor would he have been inclined to pursue such a cultural pursuit.

*The Old Testament, however, furnishes ample proof that David was a harpist and as such had both the inclination and ability to write poetry and songs. One such example is the song written by David as recorded in 2 Samuel 1:19-27 when he found out about the death of Saul and Jonathan. Other passages that attest to David's artistic abilities include 2 Samuel 23:1; Amos 6:5; 1 Samuel 16:18; 2 Samuel 6:5; 1 Chronicles 16:4-5; 2 Chronicles 7:6 and 29:25.*

*Furthermore, the New Testament repeatedly refers to David as being the author of many of the Psalms. Christ referred to David as being the author of Psalm 110 in Matthew 22:45. Other passages referring to David as being the author of the Psalms include Acts 4:24-25; Luke 20:42-44; Acts 1:20; Acts 2:25-28; and Romans 4:6-8.*

### **The Reliability of the Hebrew Psalm Titles**

Many critics automatically assume that many of the Psalm titles were later additions by rabbis and hence, in most cases, are mere speculation. However, closer analysis reveals that the Psalm titles themselves are highly accurate.

1. Why would later rabbis add titles to the Psalms, especially when the titles apparently contradict the content of the Psalm itself? For example, Psalm 60 contains references to battles that appear no where else in the Old Testament.
2. The LXX supports the early writing of the titles of the Psalms since many technical words are found in the titles that were lost during the time of Alexander the Great when the LXX was written. In fact, the LXX translators mistranslated many titles of the Psalms. One such example is Psalm 44 in which the phrase "to the choir leader" is translated "unto the end" in the LXX. Another example is Psalm 80 in which the phrase "to the lilies" is translated "For those who will suffer alteration." Finally, the phrase "According to maidens" in Psalm 46 is translated as "Concerning the hidden things" in the LXX.

3. Interestingly, 1 Maccabees 7:17 refers to Psalm 79:3 as being Holy Scripture. This could hardly be the case if the Psalms were composed very late.

It has been the case that twentieth-century scholarship is moving away from the assumed post-exilic dating of the Psalms to seeing them as being written much earlier.

### ***History of the Compilation of the Psalms***

Since the Psalms comprise such a long period of time, from that of Moses to Post-exilic times, it is no surprise that they were most likely accumulated in stages. Since the grouping of the Psalms appear to date back to an early period, it is most likely that each of the "books" of the Psalms were compiled separately and then combined into the book which we have today.

1. Book I (Psalms 1-41) was most likely arranged by David or someone under his direction.
2. Book II (Psalms 42-72) was possibly compiled after the life of David. Psalm 72:20 apparently states that the prayers of David are now ended and as such would seem to be the end of David's collection comprising Psalms 1-72.
3. Book III (Psalms 73-89) was possibly compiled during the time of Josiah or even Hezekiah although we cannot be certain of this.
4. Book IV and V are miscellaneous Psalms, the date of which is uncertain.

### ***Rationalists and the Date of the Psalms***

Rationalism has basically taken the Psalms and subjected them to Form Criticism<sup>1</sup>. This was first done by Hermann Gunkel who came up with five types of Psalms:

1. Hymns which were used for communal worship.
2. Communal laments related to some community disaster.
3. Royal psalms focusing on the Israelite King as a servant of Jehovah.
4. Individual laments in which the author finds himself in dire straits calling upon God for strength and faith.
5. Songs of thanksgiving.

Other rationalist critics took Gunkel's work and extended it further by interpreting many of the Psalms in light of pagan festivals and community life. For example, some did not see any individualistic references in the Psalms at all but saw them as reflecting a worshipping community. The "enthronement" psalms were interpreted as referring to pagan holidays in which Yahweh was enthroned much like the practice in Babylon regarding Marduk. Of course, all of these speculations deny the inspiration and uniqueness of Scripture.

### ***Contents of the Psalm Titles***

Some argue that the current placement of the titles as found in the Masoretic Text (MT) are not correct. J. W. Thirtle asserts that what appears in some of the current titles were in

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<sup>1</sup> Form Criticism is a method of analysis in which the text is examined in light of its literary form and situation in life in which it arose. Supposedly by doing this, it is possible to see what the original writer had in mind as one identifies the life situation and cultural values in which the text was formed and written.

fact part of the postscript of the preceding Psalm His analysis results in the following elements being ascribed to the postscript and the title:

#### Postscript

1. Notation - to the choir director.
2. Musical directions - which instrument to use.
3. The occasion or melody tune.

#### Title

1. The type of Psalm - for example psalm, instruction, song, or atonement song.
2. The authorship.
3. The occasion - why was the Psalm written.

### ***Technical Terms in the Psalms***

<b>Term</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Psalm</b>
Mizmor	Musical accompaniment	57
Shîr	Vocal music	27
Maskîl	Didactic or contemplative	13
Mikhtam	Song of covering or atonement	6
T <sup>e</sup> pillah	Prayer	5
T <sup>e</sup> hillah	Song of praise	5
Siggayon	Wandering or irregular song	1
Lamm <sup>e</sup> nasseah	To the choir leader	55
N <sup>e</sup> ginot	With stringed instruments	13
N <sup>e</sup> hillot	With wind instruments	1
Seminit	With an eight-stringed lute or an octave below soprano	2
alamot	Soprano or high-pitched	2
Mahalat	Song of lament	2
al mut lab-ben	Death of a son	1
al ayyelet has-sahar	According to the hind of the morning	1
Susan or al sosnnim	To the lilies	3
al tashet	Do not destroy or corrupt	4
al Yonat elem rehoqim	According to a dove of silence those who are afar off	1

*Selah* is a difficult term to define, but the most plausible is that it is meant to signal a pause for the music to catch up.

### ***Types of Psalms***

1. **Messianic** - prophetically speak of the coming Messiah or some aspect of his Kingdom. Examples are Psalm 2, 8, 22, 69, and 110.
2. **Lament** - a cry to God for help. Example are Psalm 7, 26, and 60.
3. **Testimonial** - a declaration by the writer of God's goodness and deliverance. Examples are Psalm 30 and 34.
4. **Pilgrim** - also known as "songs of ascent" used by pilgrims as they journeyed to the holy city. Examples are Psalm 120-134.

5. **Imprecatory** - seek God's judgment on his enemies. Examples are Psalm 58 and 109.
6. **Penitential** - mostly written by David over sorrow for his own sin. Examples are Psalm 32 and 51.
7. **Wisdom** - give guidelines to God's people. Examples are Psalm 37 and 73.
8. **Historical** - look back on God's dealings with Israel. Examples are Psalm 78, 105, and 106.
9. **Nature** - describe God's handiwork and power in nature. Examples are Psalm 8 and 19.