OLD TESTAMENT · POETRY AND WISDOM · BOOK 19 OF 66

Psalms

Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD (150:6)

150	David	c. 1440–450 B.C.	Five Books
Psalms, 2,461 Verses	and Other Writers	About 1,000 Years	Each Ends in Praise

STRUCTURE

The Book in Five Parts

The 150 psalms are arranged in five books. Each book closes with a short blessing of praise, and the last five psalms close the whole collection with “Praise ye the LORD.”



Each bar shows that part’s share of the 2,461 verses.

I 1–41 · 616 verses

Book I

Almost all psalms of David: trouble, trust and praise.

II 42–72 · 465 verses

Book II

The sons of Korah, songs of Zion, David’s confession, and the king.

III 73–89 · 358 verses

Book III

Asaph and Korah: the ruined sanctuary and the covenant with David.

IV 90–106 · 321 verses

Book IV

Moses’ prayer, “The LORD reigneth,” and Israel’s history retold.

V 107–150 · 701 verses

Book V

Thanksgiving, Psalm 119, the Songs of Degrees, and Hallelujah.

THE WRITERS

Who Wrote the Psalms?

The titles above most psalms name their writers. David wrote the most; the Holy Spirit spoke through them all (2 Samuel 23:2).

73 DAVID

David

“The sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Samuel 23:1); also Psalms 2 and 95 (Acts 4:25; Hebrews 4:7).

12 ASAPH

Asaph

David’s chief singer (1 Chronicles 16:5): Psalms 50 and 73–83.

11 KORAH

Sons of Korah

Levite singers: 42, 44–49, 84–85, 87–88.

2 SOLOMON

Solomon

David’s son: Psalms 72 and 127.

1 MOSES

Moses

“A Prayer of Moses the man of God”: Psalm 90, the oldest psalm.

1 HEMAN

Heman

Heman the Ezrahite, a singer of the house of Korah: Psalm 88.

1 ETHAN

Ethan

Ethan the Ezrahite: Psalm 89, the covenant with David.

50 NOT NAMED

No Name Given

About fifty, including Psalms 1, 33, 91 and most of 146–150.

> *“The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and His word was in my tongue.”*
>
> 2 Samuel 23:2 (KJV)

THE FIVE BOOKS

Each Book Ends in Praise

Each of the five books closes with a doxology, a short blessing of praise to God.

I 41:13

Book I

“Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting. Amen, and Amen.”

II 72:19

Book II

“And blessed be His glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with His glory; Amen, and Amen.”

III 89:52

Book III

“Blessed be the LORD for evermore. Amen, and Amen.”

IV 106:48

Book IV

“And let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the LORD.”

V 146–150

Book V

“Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.”

150:6

PSALMS AT A GLANCE · PART 2 OF 5

Kinds of Psalms, Hebrew Poetry and the Alphabet Psalms

MANY VOICES

Six Kinds of Psalms

The psalms speak to God in many ways. Many psalms mix kinds: a cry for help often turns into thanksgiving.

E.G. 3, 13, 22, 42, 88

Lament

Cries to God in trouble that end in trust.

"How long wilt Thou forget me, O LORD?"

13:1

E.G. 30, 34, 107, 116, 138

Thanksgiving

Telling others what God has done in answer to prayer.

"I love the LORD, because He hath heard my voice"

116:1

E.G. 8, 33, 100, 103, 145–150

Hymn of Praise

Praising God for who He is: Creator, King and Redeemer.

"Bless the LORD, O my soul"

103:1

E.G. 2, 20, 21, 45, 72, 110

Royal

Psalms of the King God anointed and His reign.

"Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion"

2:6

E.G. 1, 37, 49, 73, 119

Wisdom

Teaching the two ways and the blessing of God's word.

"The LORD knoweth the way of the righteous"

1:6

E.G. 11, 16, 23, 62, 91, 121

Trust

Quiet confidence in God's care and protection.

"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want"

23:1

READING HEBREW POETRY

Rhyming Thoughts, Not Sounds

Hebrew poetry pairs lines: the second line echoes, contrasts with, or builds on the first. This is called parallelism.

ECHO · 19:1

The Same Thought Again

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handywork."

CONTRAST · 1:6

The Opposite Thought

"For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish."

BUILDING · 1:1

Each Line Adds a Step

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful."

Selah (71 times) is a musical sign, usually taken as a pause: stop and think on what has just been sung.

ACROSTICS

The Alphabet Psalms

In these psalms the lines or stanzas begin with the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet in order, from Aleph to Tau. The pattern helped God's people learn them by heart and pictures praise that is complete.

PSALM 25

One Verse per Letter

"Shew me Thy ways, O LORD"

PSALM 34

One Verse per Letter

"O taste and see that the LORD is good"

PSALM 37

Every Other Verse

"Delight thyself also in the LORD"

PSALM 111

Each Half-Line

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom"

PSALM 112

Each Half-Line

"Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD"

PSALM 119

Eight Verses per Letter

176 verses in 22 stanzas

PSALM 145

One Verse per Letter

"Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised"

PSALMS 9–10

Together

The two psalms share one alphabet pattern

PSALMS AT A GLANCE · PART 3 OF 5

Psalm 23 and the Songs of Degrees

THE BEST-LOVED PSALM

Psalm 23: The LORD Is My Shepherd

David, once a shepherd himself, pictures the LORD first as a shepherd caring for His sheep (verses 1–4), then as a host welcoming His guest (verses 5–6).

PSALM 23 (KJV)

A Psalm of David

"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever."

1 VERSE 1

The Shepherd

He owns, leads and provides: "I shall not want."

2 VERSE 2

Green Pastures

Rest and refreshment beside still waters.

3 VERSE 3

Right Paths

He restores and guides, "for His name's sake."

4 VERSE 4

The Dark Valley

No fear, because "Thou art with me."

5 VERSE 5

The Host's Table

A feast in front of enemies; an overflowing cup.

6 VERSE 6

The House of the LORD

Goodness and mercy follow me home for ever.

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth His life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

PSALMS 120–134

The Songs of Degrees

Fifteen short psalms, each titled "A Song of degrees," sung by pilgrims going up to Jerusalem for the feasts.

> *"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD."*
>
> Psalm 122:1 (KJV)

120
In Distress

121
Mine Eyes unto the Hills

122
Glad to Go Up

123
Eyes upon God

124
Our Help

125
Mountains Round About

126
Tears to Joy

127
The LORD Builds the House

128
A Blessed Home

129
Afflicted, Not Beaten

130
Out of the Depths

131
A Weaned Child

132
David and the Ark

133
Brethren in Unity

134
Bless the LORD

Psalm 119 and a Psalm for Every Season

THE LONGEST CHAPTER

Psalm 119: A Love Song to God’s Word

Almost every one of its 176 verses speaks of God’s word.

> *“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”*
>
> Psalm 119:105 (KJV)

176 Verses
The longest chapter in the Bible.

22 Stanzas
One for each Hebrew letter, Aleph to Tau.

8 Verses Each
Every verse in a stanza begins with its letter.

Eight Words for God’s Word

Law
119:1

Testimonies
119:2

Ways
119:3

Precepts
119:4

Statutes
119:5

Commandments
119:6

Judgments
119:7

Word
119:9

“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee” (119:11).

HONEST PRAYER

A Psalm for Every Season of the Heart

The psalms give words for fear, guilt, grief and joy alike, and nearly every cry for help turns toward trust and praise.

PSALMS 27; 56
When Afraid
“What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee” (56:3)

PSALMS 32; 51
When Guilty
“Create in me a clean heart, O God” (51:10)

PSALMS 10; 13; 22
When God Seems Far
“Why standest Thou afar off, O LORD?” (10:1)

PSALMS 55; 121
When Anxious
“Cast thy burden upon the LORD” (55:22)

PSALMS 40; 130
When Waiting
“I waited patiently for the LORD” (40:1)

PSALMS 42; 137
When Grieving
“Why art thou cast down, O my soul?” (42:5)

PSALMS 103; 107
When Thankful
“O give thanks unto the LORD, for He is good” (107:1)

PSALMS 100; 150
When Joyful
“Make a joyful noise unto the LORD” (100:1)

PSALMS AT A GLANCE · PART 5 OF 5

Christ in the Psalms, Key Themes and Key Verse

LOOKING TO CHRIST

Christ in the Psalms

Jesus said the things "written … in the psalms, concerning Me" must be fulfilled (Luke 24:44). Here are eight psalms the New Testament applies to Him.

PSALM 2:7 · ACTS 13:33; HEBREWS 1:5

God's Son

"Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee"

PSALM 8:4–6 · HEBREWS 2:6–9

Crowned with Glory

"Thou madest Him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands"

PSALM 16:10 · ACTS 2:27, 31

Raised from the Dead

"Neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption"

PSALM 22:1 · MATTHEW 27:46

On the Cross

"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

PSALM 31:5 · LUKE 23:46

His Last Words

"Into Thine hand I commit My spirit"

PSALM 69:9 · JOHN 2:17

Zeal for God's House

"The zeal of Thine house hath eaten Me up"

PSALM 110:1 · MATTHEW 22:44; ACTS 2:34–35

David's Lord

"Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool"

PSALM 118:22 · MATTHEW 21:42; 1 PETER 2:7

The Rejected Stone

"The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner"

BIG IDEAS

Key Themes

The LORD Reigns

God is King over Israel and over all the earth.

47:7; 93:1; 97:1

Refuge

A rock, fortress and shelter for all who trust Him.

18:2; 46:1; 91:1

Honest Prayer

Every feeling can be brought to God.

13; 51; 126

God's Word

His law gives life, wisdom and light.

1:2; 19:7; 119:105

The Messiah

God's anointed King, Son and Priest, fulfilled in Christ.

2; 22; 110

Repentance and Forgiveness

Sin confessed is forgiven by a merciful God.

32:5; 51:10; 103:12

God's Covenant with David

A throne established for ever.

89:3–4; 132:11

Creation

The heavens and the earth declare God's glory.

8; 19:1; 104

Praise

From lament to Hallelujah: the book ends in praise.

100; 145–150

KEY VERSE

"Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD."

Psalm 150:6 (KJV)