

**Psalms (Selected)**  
Men's Bible Study  
Spring-Summer 2021

**Introduction** (Adapted from: JTE Renner, *Psalms*; Chi Rho Commentary Series, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1980. Pages 8-12)

We know from the New Testament (NT) that our Lord prayed from the Psalter when He was dying on the cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (22:1). The apostles and other holy writers of the NT frequently quoted from it. Yes, the Psalms are God's Word, even though they came down to us as prayers of the people of God. Strictly speaking, they are man's response to God's activity with His people, inspired by the Spirit of God Himself.

**Title**

The word "psalm" (Heb. *Mizmor*) really means a song that is accompanied by a stringed instrument. In the Hebrew the Psalter is called *Tehillim* ("praises"), and covers the entire 150 psalms (even though some are laments and complaints). The English "psalm" comes from the Greek version of the OT (LXX = Septuagint), and means "songs."

**Time of Origin**

This is often difficult to determine and disagreed about by scholars. Some psalms are very early (from the time of the Exodus) and others quite late (after the exile to Babylon).

**Authorship**

More than 70 psalms have the heading "a Psalm of David" and it is widely held that David was the author (72, 127). Moses is given credit for one (90), Solomon, as well as Asaph for twelve, and eleven to the sons of Korah, and Heman, or Etam. There are 49 psalms with no name attached to them. It must be remembered that these captions over some psalms were added after the individual psalms were composed.

**Organization**

The Book of Psalm organizes itself into five major sections ("Books"):

- 1-41 mostly personal psalms of David;
- 42-72 psalms of David and the kingdom; nationalistic;
- 73-89 psalms of Asaph and the sons of Korah; nationalistic;
- 90-106 anonymous psalms and laments;
- 107-150 songs of assents and praise; psalms of David.

Each division closes with a doxology. It is difficult to know at this time why the psalms were organized they way they were.

**Hebrew Poetry**

The Psalms were composed in poetic form. Hebrew poetry is made up of thought units which "rhyme." There is no rhyming of words themselves at the end of lines; rather, it is the thoughts which run parallel to one another. This system of rhyming is called parallelism of members, a "member" being a thought unit. There are basically four (or more) types of this system:

- a. synonymous – parallel words that mean the same thing (synonyms), 2:1;
- b. synthetic – the second part advances and develops the first proposition, 24:3-4;
- c. antithetic – the second part contrasts with the first, 1:6;
- d. climatic – the second part completes the first by repeating part of the first line then adding to it, 96:7.

Other kinds of parallelism: emblematic (2<sup>nd</sup> explains 1<sup>st</sup>), alternate (ABAB), chiastic (ABBA)

### **Types and Categories (Renner)**

Hymns – descriptive praise, *Tehillim*;

Laments (community & individual) – crying out to God with a need, often finishing with thanks to God for deliverance, Ps 22;

Thanksgiving – similar to “hymns”

Royal – (a) the Lord as king (47; 93; 96-99; (b) messianic with the Lord’s Anointed as central (2; 45; 72; 46; 48; 76);

Liturgies – the word of a priest and the response of the congregation

Wisdom – the *Torah*, the Law as God’s will for man; teaching (didactic) (1; 19; 78;;105; 112; 127; 133)

### **Types and Categories (TLSB)**

Wisdom: 1; 19:8-15 (?); 34; 37; 49; 73; 78; 111; 112; 119; 127; 128; 133; 139

Messianic/Royal: 2; 20; 21; 45; 72; 89; 101; 110; 132; 144; enthronement: 47; 93; 96-99

Individual Laments: 3-7; 10-14; 16; 17; 22; 23; 25-28; 31; 35; 36; 38-43; 51-59; 61-64; 69; 71; 73; 86; 88; 102; 109; 130

Community Laments: 44; 60; 74; 77; 79; 80; 83; 85; 89; 90; 94; 123; 126; 137

Imprecatory: 35; 69; 79; 109

Individual Praise: 9; 18; 30-32; 40; 66; 92; 138

Trust: 23; 27; 62; 63; 71; 131

Community Praise: 106; 124; 129

Descriptive Praise: 8; 19; 29; 33; 57; 65; 66; 89; 100; 103; 104; 111; 113-117; 134-136; 139; 145-150

Creation: 8; 19; 104; 139

Zion: 46; 48; 76; 84; 87

Liturgical: 24; 66; 107; 118; 121; 122; (120-134 are Songs of Ascent to the temple for the Feast of Weeks; The *Hillel* psalms (113-118) were sung at the Passover meal and at other major festivals

### **Interpretation**

The basic rule of biblical interpretation: “It’s all about Jesus Christ.”

## Words of Uncertain Meaning

In headings: *Mictam* (16; 56-60) *Shiggaion* (7); Musical terms: *Lamnasseah* (“to the choirmaster?”); *Selah*

**Psalms in LXX (Greek OT):** Psalm 9 includes 10:1-18 at the end; Ps. 10 = Ps. 11 Hebrew/English; LXX 114 & 115 = Ps. 116 Hebrew/English;

LXX has additional Psalm “151” not found in Hebrew Bible.

### Psalm 151 (NRSV)

*A psalm of David after he had fought in single combat with Goliath*

<sup>1</sup> I was small among my brothers, and the youngest in my father’s house;  
I tended my father’s sheep.

<sup>2</sup> My hands made a harp;  
my fingers fashioned a lyre.

<sup>3</sup> And who will tell my Lord?  
The Lord himself; it is he who hears.

<sup>4</sup> It was he who sent his messenger  
and took me from my father’s sheep,  
and anointed me with his anointing oil.

<sup>5</sup> My brothers were handsome and tall,  
but the Lord was not pleased with them.

<sup>6</sup> I went out to meet the Philistine,  
and he cursed me by his idols.

<sup>7</sup> But I drew his own sword;  
I beheaded him, and took away disgrace from the people of Israel.