



Psalms for Believers - An Introduction to the History and Authorship

How can we possibly get our little human minds around something as magnificent as the Book of Psalms? This is the book that satisfies our souls. When we are elated, it expresses our joy. When we are discouraged it encourages. When we are depressed, it tells us we are not alone, but we are taken care of and tended to by a divine shepherd.

Kings as well as humble farm folk get it when they read the Psalms. No special education is needed to understand the divine wisdom that oozes from its pages. The entire human experience is addressed in its verses. No instruction book is needed to understand the words that leap from the pages of our Bibles and lodge into our souls.

Why is this? In Psalm 22 we learn that God inhabits the praise of His people. Psalms literally means "Praises." When we gain the right understanding of Who God is and when we begin to understand His glory and His greatness, we begin to praise Him. I don't know exactly how it all works. I am not sure if it brings God close to us, but I do know that it brings us close to Him. The praises bubble up from the deepest places in our souls.

Pastor sings these words:

(Psalm 5:1-3, KJV)

*Give ear to my words O Lord
Consider my meditation
Harken unto the voice of my cry
My King and my God
For unto Thee will I pray
My voice shalt Thou hear
In the morning
O Lord in the morning
Will I direct my prayer
Unto Thee and will look up*

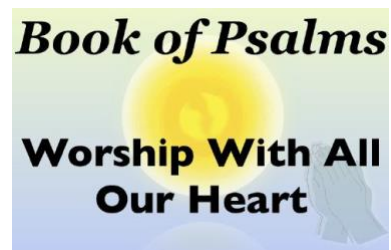
Today we will look at some facts about the Psalms so we can all gain a better understanding of what they communicate and how they communicate it. I think this is the greatest book of poetry ever written.

This morning I want to give you an understanding of how the book was put together and what some of the literary devices are that are contained within it. The Book of Psalms is divided up into 5 sections, and we'll study at least two psalms from each section over the next ninety days.

Some of our back ground survey will include:

- 1) A review of the history and authorship.
- 2) Technical information on Hebrew poetry - devices used in Hebrew.
- 3) We'll study each of the five general groups of psalm types.

Objective: You'll know and differentiate between the types of the Psalms themselves. The Psalms should become more meaningful to you.



The Psalms have a unique quality in that they are universal - they give comfort without a critical understanding. When you read them you are comforted. You don't have to be a scholar to get comfort from them. How can a book that is from such a complex religion have so much universal appeal? Because they speak to every part of the human condition and the human experience. The words in the Psalms were written by the hand of men, but they were directly authored by the Holy Spirit of God. They, like all of scripture, were divinely inspired. Paul considered the Psalms to be scripture as He wrote his young protégé Timothy. He said, *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."* (2 Timothy 3:16-17, NKJV).

There are some basic facts about the Book of Psalms:

- 1) They show us the words of worship. It's sort of like being in harness. They show intimacy with God when there was no such relationship with the gods of this kind of thing. This is a look at a personal intimate relationship with God. Sometimes when we're just not able to come up with the words we need to praise the Lord, the Psalms show us the words or worship. Who is not moved to praise when reading *"I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. ² My soul shall make its boast in the LORD; The humble shall hear of it and be glad. ³ Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together. (Psalm 34:1-3, NKJV).*

2) They are filled with theological certainty. This means they give us ground to stand on. They tell us truth. They tell us not only where we can hang our hats, but they tell us where we can hang our lives. They tell us about God's character. They are written with the assumption that God is real, He is there, He is the one who blesses, and He is the one who answers prayer. They also show us the wonderful promises of God. We see the presence and the power of God to answer prayer.

3) They are timeless in their beauty. By that I mean that they are truly beautiful and speak to our souls like no other piece of literature. In every culture regardless of the point in time, it is beautiful to hear, "The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want." Recently when I experienced the death of my mother, I took comfort in knowing that mother's death was "precious in the eyes of the Lord" because of the death of this saint. As ugly as it became humanly, I rested in the assurance that somehow her death was precious in His eyes. It speaks to anyone anywhere. There is no other piece of ancient literature that speaks to the human soul like this.



4) They are inspired by God. They were inspired by the Holy Spirit. This includes both the Old and New Testament.

² *"The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me; his word was on my tongue." (2 Samuel 23:2, NIV).* Samuel was clear that it was God Who was speaking through him in scripture.

In Matthew 22:43, Jesus says, "He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'?" (NIV). Jesus is clear that the Holy Spirit was speaking through David when he penned the words in the Psalms.

And in Luke 24:44, we read, "⁴⁴ He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." (NIV). Jesus was telling us that the Psalms are prophetic and they contain much about Jesus Himself!

Peter confirms the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in scripture when he says in the Book of Acts, "Brothers and sisters, the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus. ¹⁷ He was one of our number and shared in our ministry." (Acts 1:16-17, NIV).

As I mentioned above, Paul also teaches that the entire Old Testament was inspired by God. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:16-17, NKJV).

5) The Book of Psalms is quoted more in the New Testament than any other book in the Bible. Jesus quoted Exodus seven times. He quoted Isaiah eight times. He quoted

Deuteronomy five times, but He quoted the Book of Psalms the most. He quoted it eleven times. (If it's that important to Jesus then it should be that important to us!)

6) There are 150 Psalms in the Book of Psalms, but there are other Psalms in the Old Testament. They were gathered into small collections over the years. In Psalm 72:20 it says that David's Psalms are ended, but Psalm 86, 101, 103, 108 are all credited to David. This suggests that two or more collections were combined over time.

There are duplicate Psalms. For example, Psalm 14 and Psalm 53 are the same. Likewise, pieces of Psalms are found elsewhere in scripture. You'll notice Psalm 105:1-15 and 1 Chronicles 16:8-22 are the same. The Book of Psalms that we have came out of a collection of little books.

7) Some of the Psalms were for specific occasions. For example, Psalms 113-118 are what are called The Hillel, because they begin and end with "Praise the Lord." These were sung at the three great festivals: (1) Dedication, (2) New Moon, and (3) The Passover. Jesus would have sung these with the apostles at the last supper.

8) All the psalms in the Bible are not in the Book of Psalms. Examples would be "Moses' song of deliverance" (Exodus 15:1-18), "Deborah's Song of Praise" (Judges 5), "David's Lament over Saul and Jonathan" (2 Samuel 1:19-27), "Hezekiah's Praise for Deliverance from illness" (Isaiah 38:9-20). Lastly, Jonah sang a psalm when he found himself in the belly of a great fish.....at the end of the psalm the Lord caused the fish to spit him out (Jonah 2). These are obviously just some of the psalms that were written over the centuries, but all were not included in the Book of Psalms.



More Background on the Psalms

The Psalms were put into five different sections, each section ending in a Psalm of Praise:

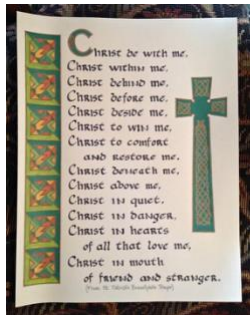
- 1) Psalms 1-41 - The first book emphasizes that God is always **"beside us."** "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters." (Psalm 23)¹
- 2) Psalms 42-72 - Here attention is given to how God **"goes before us"**. David confesses his sin in Psalm 51 and pleads with the Lord to wash away his transgression and to create in him a clean heart.
- 3) Psalms 73-89 - The third book (Psalms 73–89) reminds us that **God is all around us.** Asaph recounts the history of God's people in Psalm 78, showing us that God has been at work

¹ <https://homeschool-101.com/psalms-devotional/> - all five summaries are quoted from the website listed

the whole time. He admonishes the children of Israel to tell the next generation, even the children yet to be born, the great and mighty deeds of the Lord.

4) Psalms 90-106 - The fourth book (Psalms 90–106) focuses on how God is **above us**. Psalm 90 is the one psalm credited to Moses. In it, he speaks of how our lives on this earth are brief, so we need to number our days rightly. God, on the other hand, is eternal, and He will reign forever and ever.

5) Psalms 107-150 - In the fifth and final book (Psalms 107–150), the spotlight is on how **God is among us**. Psalm 128 paints a beautiful picture of a man who fears God. He is happy and blessed. His wife is like a fruitful vine within the home, and his children are like olive plants around the table. And he shall see peace and prosperity in his nation.



Reading this summary of the five "chapters" so to speak of Psalms lead me to think on the great song attributed to Saint Patrick. In the Irish Gaelic language, we use a series of prepositional pronouns that don't exactly exist in any other language. There is a different word for "on me," "in you," "beside me," "before me," "around me," etc. When Patrick was trying to describe his desire to be near the Lord, he wrote a series of these prepositional pronouns in the Irish. It is poetically spoken in the 1940 Episcopal Hymn Book.

5 Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

Dear friend, as you read the Psalms, my prayer is that you will find Jesus in them. I pray that you will learn to ask Him to be with you. I pray that you will experience His Holy Spirit in you. May you feel Him behind you, in front of you, beside you, under you, and above you. In reading the Psalms I pray that He will win you to Himself. May the Psalms speak deep comfort and restoration to your soul. May you hear Him in the quiet and even when you're in the turmoil of life. My prayer Lord, is that you will be in the heart of each of those who claim to love me. And, may I recognize you when you speak in the mouth of my friends and in the mouths of strangers.

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by

snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.