

# Psalms

**Authorship:** Many of the psalms mention their authors by name:

- David, king of Israel, authored at least half of the psalms; 73 are ascribed to him within the psalm, and two others are credited to him in the NT (See Acts 4:25-26; and Hebrews 4:7);
- Either Asaph, a Levite in charge of worship music in the Tabernacle (1 Chronicles 15:16-17), or one of his descendants authored at least 12 psalms (50; 73-83);
- The “descendants of Korah,” the priest who led a rebellion against Moses (Numbers 16), authored at least 12 psalms. Psalm 88 lists Herman the Ezrahite (See 1 Chronicles 6:33 as an author along with them);
- Solomon, king of Israel, wrote Psalms 72 and 127;
- Moses, Israel’s law giver and deliverer, authored the oldest psalm, 90;
- Some scholars have suggested king Hezekiah as author of the unattributed “song of accents”;
- Ethan the Ezrahite wrote at least one psalm (89);
- 34 of the psalms are unattributed.

**Date:** The Psalms were written over a period of about 900 years, from the time of Moses (90, written about 1405 B.C.) to the time of Israel’s return from Babylonian exile (126, 147-150, written c. 500 B.C.).

**Background:** The book of Psalms is a collection of poems and songs written by various Israelites over a period of about 900 years (See Date). Most of the psalms were obviously meant for public worship, while others seem more suitable for private worship or reflection. Psalms is divided into five “books” (See Outline), each ending with a similar doxology. Many scholars believe this division reflects the historical development of the Psalms, with Books One and Two being compiled during or shortly after the time of David, Books Three and Four being added after Israel’s fall, and Book Five coming after the return of from exile. Others have seen in the division an effort to match Israel’s five books of Law with the books of praise. The Psalms deal with a wide variety of themes and historical events. Most of the psalms include titles, some of which explain their purpose or historical background.

**Purpose:** The purpose of the various psalms differs somewhat, depending on the author and the occasion of writing:

- Almost all of the psalms in some way called the believer’s attention to some characteristic of God and the role He plays or should play in the believer’s life. These may be expressions of either public or private worship.
- Many of the psalms taught Israel about God’s work in their history.
- The original purpose of many psalms is overshadowed by their messianic prophecies.
- Several psalms, such as 6, 32, and 51 are prayers of personal confession and repentance.
- Many psalms, such as 7, 35, 55, and 109 are “imprecatory,” calling on God to punish the wicked. While the violent language of these psalms may sometimes seem out of keeping with a God of grace and love, the following should be kept in mind:
  - ↳ The hatred expressed reflected concern over violation of God’s laws, not personal grievances.
  - ↳ The psalmists were right in expressing these things to God in prayer rather than seeking their own vengeance (see Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12: 19).
  - ↳ The psalmists were motivated as much by concern for the victims of sin as by hatred for the sinners themselves (see 10:8-10).
  - ↳ Though the psalmists prayed against their enemies, they prayed for them as well (see 9:20, 35).
  - ↳ Even New Testament writers, with their more complete knowledge of grace, pronounced curses on people under certain circumstances (see Galatians 1:8-9; 2 Peter 2:12).

**Key Psalm:** “Psalm 150”

**Keyword:** “Hallelujah”

**Structure:** The book of Psalms is, from first to last, a book of poetry. Hebrew poetry lacks rhyme and regular meter but uses parallelism wherein two (or three) lines are balanced and complete a complete thought. Some parallelism is synonymous, where the second line echoes the first. Antithetic parallelism uses a contrast between the two segments, and in synthetic parallelism the second segment completes the idea in the first segment. The psalms can be divided into classes. There are hymns (145-150) and songs of thanksgiving (30-32). Psalms of lament (38-39) are prayers or cries to God on the occasion of distressful situations. Royal psalms (2; 110) are concerned with the earthly king of Israel. Enthronement psalms (96; 98) celebrate the kingship of the Lord. Penitential psalms (32; 38; 51) express contrition and repentance, and wisdom or didactic psalms (19;119) tend to be proverbial.

## Key Verse

“Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!”  
(Psalm 150:6 ESV)

**Outline:** (*Corresponds to Pentateuch of Moses*) The Book of is unlike most other biblical books since it contains many writings collected and compiled over a period of time and finally organized into its present form. For this reason, it is not possible to outline the book in the standard way. However, there is clearly a structure to the collection. The book is divided into five parts, also known as books. According to Jewish tradition, this fivefold division was based on the arrangement of the Torah (or Pentateuch), the first five books of the Bible. The Psalms are generally grouped together by their titles, such as Asaph psalms and those of the sons of Korah. Following the close of each of the four books is a doxology or statement identifying the end of one book and the beginning of another. The psalms containing these statements are known as “seam” psalms because they show the “piecing together” of these psalms to form the collection as it now stands.

**I. Book One (1-41) – Genesis Section**

*Man seen in a state of blessedness, full, and recovery (Man in View)*

Psalm 1 – Perfect Man (Last Adam)  
Psalm 2 – Rebellious Man  
Psalm 3 – Perfect Man Rejected  
Psalm 4 – Conflict Between Seed of Woman and Serpent  
Psalm 5 – Perfect Man in Midst of Enemies  
Psalm 6 – Perfect Man in Midst of Chastisement (Bruising Heel)  
Psalm 7 – Perfect Man in Midst of False Witness  
Psalm 8 – Repair of Man Comes Through Man (Bruising Head)  
Psalms 9-15 – Enemy and Antichrist Conflict: Final Deliverance  
Psalms 16-41 – Christ in Midst of His People Sanctifying Them to God

**II. Book Two (42-72) – Exodus Section**

*Ruin and Redemption (Israel in View)*

Psalms 42-49 – Israel’s Ruin  
Psalms 50-60 – Israel’s Redeemer  
Psalms 61-72 – Israel’s Redemption

**III. Book Three (73-89) – Leviticus Section**

*Darkness and Dawn (Sanctuary in View)*

Tabernacle, Temple, House, Assembly and Congregation in almost every Psalm.

**IV. Book Four (90-106) – Numbers Section**

*Peril and Protection (Earth in View)*

**V. Book Five (107-150) – Deuteronomy Section**

*Perfection and Praise of the Word of God*

Psalm 119, an acrostic in the heart of this section, refers to the Word of God in almost every verse. It is the longest chapter in the Bible.

**Sources:**

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