



## Overview for Psalms

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**Purpose:** The Psalms were written as expressions of praise, worship, and petition, forming a divinely inspired collection of devotions, meditations, and songs for the people of Israel.

**Authors:** David (seventy-three psalms), Asaph (twelve psalms), the sons of Korah (nine psalms), Solomon (two psalms), and several others. Fifty-one of the psalms are not attributed to any author.

**Date Written:** Over about one thousand years, between the time of Moses (approximately 1520 B.C.) until after the return of the Southern Kingdom from Babylonian captivity (approximately 445 B.C.).

**History:** The Psalms reflect the theology of Israel from the beginning of the nation until after the Babylonian exile. In terms of chronological sequence, the psalm attributed to Moses (Psalm 90) is the earliest. It likely provided a medium of praise and a form of prayer for the people of Israel during the nation's formative period. The Davidic psalms reflect different periods of the author's life. During Israel's golden age under King Solomon, the songs which David sang began to be a part of the nation's worship. The singing of the Psalms was a prominent feature in the celebration of the great national feasts. These were the praise songs of Isaiah and Jeremiah, along with the other prophets. It was with psalms that Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah inaugurated their reforms and celebrated their victories. The psalms brought comfort and hope to the exiles in Babylon. Chronologically, the last psalm is probably Psalm 137; it is a song of lament clearly written during the days when the Hebrews were being held captive by the Babylonians.

**Unique Features:** The Book of Psalms is the longest book in the Bible and it contains both the longest and shortest chapters (Psalms 119 and 117 respectively).

**Setting:** The Book of Psalms gives insight into the true nature of religion in Old Testament times, for this collection of songs were a vital part of the public and private worship of ancient Israel. Chanted by the Levitical choirs at the time of the morning and evening sacrifice, the people learned the lyrics and then repeated them in the less formal worship of the home. Handed down from father to son, they became a familiar thread binding the Jewish people together.

God's people rejoiced and lamented through these poetic expressions, which mirrored real-life situations and spiritual experience at every level of society. The psalms also offer meaningful insights into human nature.

**Summary:** The Hebrew title for the Book of Psalms is translated "Book of Praises." The Greek translation of the Old Testament (Septuagint) title used *Psalms*, a word meaning "a poem sung to the accompaniment of a musical instrument."

The Book of Psalms contains 150 chapters which are divided into five sections or books, each ending with a doxology: Psalms 1-41 (Book I); Psalms 42-72 (Book II); Psalms 73-89 (Book III); Psalms 90-106 (Book IV), and Psalms 107-150 (Book V). Jewish tradition compares these five books to the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible, authored by Moses).

The Psalms deal with such subjects as God and His creation, war, worship, wisdom, sin and evil, judgment, justice, and the coming of the Messiah. Bible scholars have categorized the psalms in various ways. Most recognize these main groupings:

- Alphabetic or acrostic psalms, in which the initial letter of each stanza follows a certain pattern.
- Ethical psalms, which teach moral principles.
- Hallelujah psalms, which are songs of praise beginning and/or ending with "Hallelujah" or "Praise Jehovah."
- Historical psalms, which trace God's dealings with His people.
- Imprecatory psalms, which invoke God's judgment upon one's enemies.
- Messianic psalms, which point to the coming Redeemer.
- Penitential psalms, which express sorrow for sin.
- Songs of ascent or degrees, which some scholars suggest were sung by pilgrims on the way to Jerusalem to observe the feasts.
- Psalms of suffering or lament, which are the outpourings of authors who were enduring difficult circumstances.
- Psalms of thanksgiving, which express gratitude for blessings received.

Approximately two-thirds of the psalms have superscriptions, or titles, which were probably added

at a later date by an editor or group of editors of the Psalms. Some describe the nature of the psalm (for example, “song,” “prayer,” “praise,” or the Hebrew words such as “maschil,” “michtam,” and “shiggaion”). Some relate to the musical setting, such as a dedication to the chief Musician, allusion to musical instrument on which the psalm was to be performed (“Neginoth,” “Gittih,” etc.), or a tune to which they

were to be sung. Others refer to the liturgical use of the psalm—for example, that it was to be sung on the Sabbath or at a dedication. Some of the psalms indicate authorship in the title.

There are over four hundred quotes from, or allusions to, the Book of Psalms in the New Testament. Jesus quoted from the Psalms, and references are also found in the Book of Acts and in Paul’s writings.

## Outline

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Note: This is the complete amplified outline of this book.*

- I. Book I (1:1—41:13)
- II. Book II (42:1—72:20)
- III. Book III (73:1—89:52)
- IV. Book IV (90:1—106:48)
- V. Book V (107:1—150:6)
  - A. Psalm 119 (119:1-176)
    - 1. Aleph (119:1-8)
    - 2. Beth (119:9-16)
    - 3. Gimel (119:17-24)
    - 4. Daleth (119:25-32)
    - 5. He (119:33-40)
    - 6. Vau (119:41-48)
    - 7. Zain (119:49-56)
    - 8. Cheth (119:57-64)
    - 9. Teth (119:65-72)
    - 10. Jod (119:73-80)
    - 11. Caph (119:81-88)
    - 12. Lamed (119:89-96)
    - 13. Mem (119:97-104)
    - 14. Nun (119:105-112)
    - 15. Samech (119:113-120)
    - 16. Ain (119:121-128)
    - 17. Pe (119:129-136)
    - 18. Tzaddi (119:137-144)
    - 19. Koph (119:145-152)
    - 20. Resh (119:153-160)
    - 21. Schin (119:161-168)
    - 22. Tau (119:169-176)