

Introduction to Book 5 (Psalms 107-150)

Book 5 is the longest of the five books of psalms (by three psalms over Book 1). Its theme may be succinctly stated as: “Hallelujah! Yahweh Saves!” (although there is a great variety of psalms in this collection).

There are three main segments of Book 5, each marked by “Give thanks” introductions and “Praise the Lord” conclusions. They are also distinguished by their Davidic authorship. The final five psalms are doxology and should probably be seen as corresponding to the entire collection of 150 psalms, rather than simply a conclusion to Book 5.



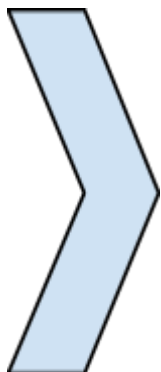
107-117 -- This is the first Davidic group, consisting of 11 psalms

118-135 – Framed by Psalms 118 and 135, this includes Psalm 119 and the Songs of Ascents (120-134). Some of these psalms are attributed to David. There are 18 psalms in this group.

136-145 -- This is the second Davidic group, although not all of them are composed by David (137 for example is exilic), There are 10 psalms in this group.

146-150 – Doxology, 5 psalms

The following is a more detailed outline based on authorship and content that reveals a chiasmic arrangement of Book 5.



107 – Call to praise in all circumstances

108-110 – Davidic Psalms

111-112 – Two short “introductions” to the “Egyptian Hallel”

113-118 – Egyptian Hallel (for use during the Festivals, primarily Passover)

119 - Torah

120-134 – Songs of Ascents (for use during the Festivals
(122,124,131,133 attributed to David; 127 to Solomon)

135-136 – Call to praise

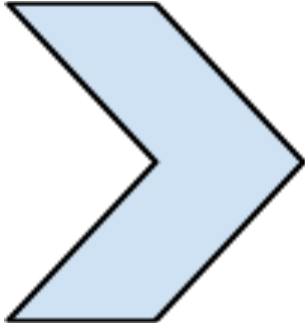
137 – Lament in exile

138-145 – Davidic Psalms

146-150 - Doxology, a climactic call for all things and all people to praise YHWH

This arrangement places the longest psalm, Psalm 119, an extended meditation on the Law of God, at the center of the chiasm. It is framed by festival songs (the Egyptian Hallel before it and the Songs of Ascents after it). These, in turn, are framed by introductions (111-112, an acrostic pair) and two calls to praise (135-136). The next frame are the Davidic psalms (108-110 and 138-145) and doxologic psalms (107 and 146-150). Psalm 137 appropriately stands alone in this arrangement.

It was noted in the *Introduction to Book 4* that the division between Books 4 and 5 seems rather arbitrary. In fact, the division between Psalms 106 and 107 seems to break the chiasm of Psalms 101-110. Consider the following structure of Psalms 101-110:



- 101 – Royal (David’s Coronation Oath)
- 102 – Individual Lament (prayer of an afflicted man)
- 103 – Love of God (David)
- 104 – Works of God (the earth as a bountiful garden)
- 105 – Historical – God’s faithfulness
- 106 – Historical–Man’s (Israel’s) unfaithfulness
- 107 – Works of God (He rescues all who call on him)
- 108 – Love of God (Psalms 57 & 60 – Davidic)
- 109 – Individual Lament (David)
- 110 – Royal (David’s Coronation Oracle)

These ten psalms form a clear chiasm centering on Psalms 105 and 106, a pair of historical psalms that contrast the faithfulness of God with the unfaithfulness of man. These are bounded by Psalms of God’s works of creation and deliverance (104 and 107) and by God’s faithful covenant love (103 and 108). The two laments (102 and 109) correspond to one another as do the royal psalms (101 and 110) that frame the chiasm.

The reason for breaking this chiasm between Psalms 106 and 107 is unclear. Perhaps this is simply an example of two overlapping chiasms -- the first (101-110) telling the redemption story framed by the reign of God, the second (107-150) focusing on the Torah, framed by communal worship at the festivals, and that, in turn, framed by individual Davidic psalms. It is acknowledged that there is some speculation involved in even suggesting these chiasms, and there is even more subjectivity in assigning the motivation for arranging the psalms as they have been arranged. It is hoped that at the very least, this analysis will help the reader locate individual psalms in some kind of broader literary context.

An Overview of the Psalter

Examining the framing psalms of all five books of Psalms reveals another interesting facet of their compilation. Each of the five books of Psalms is framed by one of two different genres of psalms -- either wisdom psalms or psalms that have a strong theme of the covenant reign of God. Consider the following framing psalms:

Books 1 & 2 (Psalms 1-72)

- 1 – Torah/Wisdom
- 2 – Royal Covenant
- 72 – Royal Covenant

Book 3 (Psalms 73-89)

- 73 – Wisdom
- 89 – Royal Covenant

Books 4 & 5 (Psalms 90-145)

- 89 – Wisdom
- 145 – Hymn to the Great King

Doxology

- 146-150

These are the great themes of the Book of Psalms. God’s wisdom is revealed in his spoken word, the *Torah*. His reign is expressed by his redemptive actions from heaven and through his royal agent on earth, his anointed king. He is to be praised for both his wisdom revealed in the *Torah* and for his benevolent reign in heaven and earth. Thus, these particular genres of psalms appropriately frame the entire *Sepher Tehillim*, the Book of Praises.