

## An Overview of the Psalms

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Torah Psalms – 1, 19, 119

5 Books of Psalms (corresponding to the 5 Books of the Law)

### **Book 1**

#### **Psalms 1-14**

1 Wisdom – Blessed is the man who delights in the Torah of the LORD (God is good)

2 Royal – “I have installed my king on Zion/You are my son” (God is sovereign)

3-7 Laments (personal)

3 “How many are my foes!” (family pain)

4 “How long!” anger (enemies)

5 Lying enemies (words)

6 I’m broken, save me (sickness, sin)

7 I’m innocent, vindicate me (injustice)

**8 Hymn** – How majestic your name/You crowned mankind with glory and honor, (**creation/man**)

9-13 Laments (societal)

9 Justice for the poor (**acrostic**)

10 Justice for those who victimize the poor (**acrostic**)

11 Foundations are being destroyed, “What can the righteous do?”

12 The LORD will arise, his words are true

13 “How long!”

14 Wisdom – “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’”

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#### **Psalms 15-24**

15 Entrance – “Who may dwell in God’s house?” (the moral person)

16 Trust – “The Lord is my portion and my cup, Your holy one will not see decay”

17 Lament – “Keep me as the apple of your eye”

18 David’s song of Thanksgiving – “I called up the LORD...and he saved me”

**19 Hymn** – God speaks/we respond – “The heavens declare...the law is perfect” (**creation/sky**)

20/21 Royal – prayers before and after battle

22 Lament – “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” (the cross)

23 Trust – “The Lord is my shepherd and host”

24 Entrance – “Who may ascend the hill of the LORD?” (the King of Glory)

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#### **Psalms 25-34**

25 Acrostic – “Teach me your ways”

26 Lament – “I’m innocent”

27 Trust – “The Lord is my light/I am confident of this”

28 Lament – “Hear my cry!”

**29 Hymn** – Voice of the LORD over the waters/enthroned over the flood (**creation/water**)

30 Thanksgiving – “You’ve turned my mourning into dancing”

31 Trust – “Into your hands I commit my spirit”


32 Penitence – “You forgave the guilt of my sin”

33 Hymn – “Sing to him a new song”, 22 verses

34 Acrostic – “Taste and see that the LORD is good”


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### **Psalms 35-41**

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- 35 Betrayal – “those who hate me without reason”
  - 36 Feast – “They feast on the abundance of your house”
  - 37 Patience – “Trust in the Lord”, an **acrostic** with two verses per letter (wisdom)
  - 38 **Pain** – “There is no health in my bones”
  - 39 Silence – “I will guard my mouth with a muzzle...My hope is in you”
  - 40 Obedience – “He lifted me out of the slimy pit...put a new song in my mouth”
  - 41 Judas – “he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me”
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### **Book 2**

#### **Psalms of the Sons of Korah** (8 here + 4 in Book 3 = 12)

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- 42/43 Individual lament – “When can I meet with God?” (God has abandoned me)
  - 44 Communal lament – “You have led us like sheep to the slaughter” (God has abandoned us)
  - 45 Royal Wedding – “the king is enthralled with you” (song of the King and his Bride)
  - 46 Communal trust – “God is within her; she will not fall” (the King and his City)
  - 47 Ascension – “God has gone up with a shout!” (The King ascends his throne)
  - 48 God dwells in Zion, his city – “Great is the Lord in the city of our God!”

#### **Repentance:**

- 49 Wisdom – “Rich fools will be shepherded by death...their graves will be their home” (Sons of Korah)
- 50 Communal repentance – “God comes to judge his people and He will not be silent” (Asaph)
- 51 Individual repentance – “Have mercy on me O God” (David)

#### **David’s Laments (based on his enemies)**

- 52 Doeg the Edomite (who slaughtered priests) “I am like an olive tree in the house of God”
- 53 The Fool (Nabal?) “The fool says in his heart ‘There is no god’”
- 54 the Ziphites (betrayed David) “He will return evil to my enemies”
- 55 a friend’s betrayal (Absalom?) “But as for me I trust in you” = central verse
- 56 the Philistines “You’ve put my tears in a bottle”
- 57 Saul “Be exalted O God...Awake my soul and sing”
- 58 unjust judges “there is a God who judges the earth”
- 59 Saul “God in his steadfast love will meet me”
- 60 Edomites “With God we shall do valiantly”

#### **David’s Prayers of Trust (61-64)**

- 61 a strong tower against my foes
- 62 my soul finds rest in God alone
- 63 I thirst for God, I sing in the shadow of your wings
- 64 God shoots back at his enemies

#### **Corporate Hymns of Praise (65-68)**

- 65 Thanksgiving for the harvest
- 66 Fire and Water (an Exodus hymn)
- 67 Missionary Prayer and Blessing
- 68 Cloud-Rider (Recalls the march from Mt Sinai to Mt Zion)

#### **Lament Turned to Testimony and Trust (69-71)**

- 69 I’ve been poisoned, they’re trying to kill me (the cross)
- 70-71 When I am old, do not forsake me

#### **A Coronation Prayer** (The Glory of the Messiah)

- 72 Royal Coronation (Solomon)

### **Book 3: Psalms for use in the Exile (Theme: Theodicy)**

#### **Asaphite collection: Psalms 73-83 (11 in Book 3 + Psalm 50 = 12)**

73 Wisdom – Why keep the covenant?

74 Communal lament over the destruction of Jerusalem

75 God humbles and exalts

76 God will judge and be victorious in battle

77 Individual lament

78 Explanation of Israel's suffering (77 Hebrew verses – longest and central psalm)

79 Pay back blood for blood

80 Israel is God's vine, a prayer to restore the vine

81 Call to worship, listen and be satisfied with honey from the Rock

82 The gods (rulers) of this world are judged for how they treated the weak

83 Prayer for rescue and judgment on foreign oppressors (Midian)

#### **Prayers in exile: Psalms 84-89 (Sons of Korah, 4 here + 8 [Psalms 42-49] = 12)**

84 Individual prayer, longing for Zion, pilgrimage

85 Communal prayer for renewal of God's mercies and a return from exile (Davidic)

86 Individual prayer for mercy

87 YHWH will establish Zion and the nations will be blessed through her

88 Individual lament (darkness)

89 Praise the God of creation and covenant, lament over Israel's unfaithfulness, appeal to God's faithfulness (Ethan the Ezrahite)

### **Book 4: Psalms 90-106 (Theme: The LORD Reigns!)**

#### **The Lord Reigns**

90 Wisdom, man's mortality (Moses)

91 God's protection "In the shadow of the Almighty"

92 The righteous will flourish like a palm tree

93 God reigns over the waters

94 God will avenge

95 Invitation to worship and Warning

96 Holy Creator and Judge

97 Rejoice in his judgment

98 YHWH's coming to judge (Joy to the World!)

99 Holy, Holy, Holy

100 Invitation to worship

101 Royal (David's Coronation Oath, the King's character)

102 Individual Lament (prayer of an afflicted man)

103 The Love of God (David)

104 Works of God in creation (the earth as a bountiful garden) (**creation/earth**)

105 Historical – God's faithfulness

106 Historical – Mankind's (Israel's) unfaithfulness

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107 Works of God in rescuing people in every situation

108 Love of God (Psalms 57 & 60 – Davidic)

109 Individual Lament (David)

110 Royal (David's Coronation Oracle, the King's role: warrior and priest)

## **Book 5: Psalms 107-150 (Theme: YHWH Saves!)**

107 Call to praise God for his salvation in all circumstances

### **108-110 Davidic psalms**

111-112 Call to praise (Praise the LORD/Fear the LORD), **acrostic**

**113-118 Egyptian Hallel** (for use during the festivals, primarily Passover)

113 – He raises the poor from the dust

114 – Exodus hymn

115 – Impotent idols

116 – Cup of salvation

117 – Universal praise

118 – Cornerstone

**119 Torah** (longest psalm, center of Book 5, meditation on the revelation of God)

**120-134 Songs of Ascents** (pilgrim songs for festival use)

120 – Repentance, “Too long have I dwelt among those who hate peace”

121 – Providence, “I lift up my eyes to the hills”

122 – Worship, “I was glad when they said to me, Let us go to the house of the LORD”

123 – Service, “As the eyes of a servant look to the hand of their master”

124 – Help, “If the LORD had not been on our side”

125 – Security, “As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people”

126 – Joy, “Those who sow in tears will reap in joy”

127 – Work, “Unless the LORD builds the house”

128 – Happiness, “Your children will be like olive shoots around your table”

129 – Perseverance, “The plowers plowed upon my back”

130 – Hope, “My soul waits for the Lord, more than watchmen for the morning”

131 – Humility, “I have calmed and quieted my soul”

132 – Obedience, “The LORD swore to David a sure oath”

133 – Community, “Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity”

134 – Blessing, “Bless the LORD”

135-136 Call to praise (Give thanks to the LORD for he is good)

137 Lament in exile – “By the waters of Babylon we sat and wept”

### **138-145 Davidic psalms**

138 Song of Praise, “May All Kings Praise You”

139 Search me

140 Rescue me

141 Rebuke me

142 Release me

143 Rescue me (penitential)

144 Royal Song of Praise (parallels Ps 18)

145 Royal Song to the Great King, **acrostic**

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

146 – My Soul (individual)

147 – Jerusalem (community)

148 – Heaven and Earth (creation)

149 – Israel/Redeemed (saints)

150 – Everything that has breath (everyone, everywhere, in every way)

**How the five books of psalms are framed (inclusio):**

**Books 1 & 2 (Psalms 1-72)**

1 Wisdom

2 Royal Covenant (David)

41 Lament

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42 Lament

72 Royal Covenant (Solomon) "This concludes the prayers of David, son of Jesse"

**Book 3 (Psalms 73-89)**

73 Wisdom (Theodicy)

89 Royal Covenant

**Books 4 and 5 (Psalms 90-145)**

90 Wisdom (man's mortality)

106 History (man's unfaithfulness)

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107 YHWH Saves!

145 Hymn to the Great King

**Doxology (Psalms 146-150)**