

The Psalms—Our words to God, or His Words to us?

“This is written for a generation yet to come... a people not yet formed” 102:18

From the Gr. 'Psalmoi', plural for the Hebrew '**Mizmor**', which means 'musical poems', usually involving instruments. Hebrew name for Psalms was *Sepher Tellehim.*, 'Book of Praise', the national hymnbook of Israel. These were not just 'songs', but include:

Laments (expressions of grief), **petitions**, **poems**, meditations, **instructions**, **historical remembrances**, **acrostics** (see 119), **Songs of Ascents**(120-134), **expressions of righteous anger** (imprecatory Psalms), **FULL RANGE OF HUMAN EMOTIONS WAS INCLUDED.**

: There were at least 8-10 authors involved, some of whom are unknown.

Authors include David (about $\frac{1}{2}$ of the Psalms), Asaph (David's choirmaster), Sons of Korah (yep, **that** Korah), Solomon, Moses, believe it or not, and a number of others.

:: Time of writing: early as the Exodus (Moses) through the Babylonian exile, up to around Ezra's time. It was edited close to its present form by about 250 BC, time of the Septuagint. Hebrews canonized it with the rest of the OT by 90 AD or so.

::: **A compilation** of several ancient collections of Hebrew songs/poetry ('musical poems') that were combined into 5 books (likely to match the 5 books of the law) for the purpose of personal and congregational worship.

Book One—Ps 1-41. Most of these are David's, which sets up the whole book.

Book Two—Ps 42-72. 4 chapters are anonymously written, some David, Asaph, Sons of Korah, Solomon.

Book Three—Ps 73-89. Most are by Asaph (David's choirmaster).

Book Four—Ps 90-106. Moses, David, Solomon, and a number of unnamed

people contributed to it.

Book Five—Ps 107-150. Pay special attention to 113-118 (Egyptian Hallel), used in homes celebrating Passover for thousands of years. Also, 146-150 (the Great Hallel), each one beginning with 'Hallelujah!' in Hebrew.

Note: each book has a Doxology chapter, with a final 'big' one in Ch. 150.

:::: Purpose--As above, personal and congregational worship, but based on 'meditation'.. See Ps 1:1-2... 'Meditate' (hagah) means to 'mutter, sigh, speak while you contemplate.' In other words, to think, repeat, talk it out while you think it out.

There is a subtle difference to our western notion of meditation, which is more mental.

Problems with Psalms—Stuff to Remember

- Poetry, lyrics seldom translate cleanly from one (ancient) language to another. Something is lost, at least in the beauty of it. Read your commentary and it will make more sense. Try to 'hear it as they heard it' (exegetis, remember?)
- What about all the, well, whining? How 'human' can we be without sinning?
- Do the O.T. forms of worship apply today? How far can we take them?

--Help in Reading Psalms—

Look at historical contexts. For example, what was going on in David's mind when King Saul was giving him fits? Look at Ps 7, 34, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59 and 142 refer to that time. Ps 3, 18, 51, 60 and 63 are more upbeat because that was when David ruled both Judah and Israel, and God was prospering him. **Either way, David ran to God.**

Look at the subheadings before chapters. They will either say 'of', 'to', or 'for', meaning 'dedicated to', 'belonging to', etc, and it will give you a clue of the occasion, usually dealing with the life of David.

Other types of subheadings need to be looked at. Unfamiliar words may show up like 'mizmor' (songs normally accompanied by musical instruments), 'maschil' (a psalm used for the purpose of teaching), or 'michtam' (a prayer, petition). Helps explain context.

Parallelisms: One good thing about the translation of Psalms is that, instead of rhyming sounds like they do in English, Hebrew poets used 'Parallelism'—the rhyming of thoughts. 36:5 is a good example of this, where the same thought is expressed in different lines. Ps 19:1-6 parallels God's general revelation thru nature, then specific revelation of the Creator to His creation thru His Word, vs 7-14.

Sometimes, a second line will state the negative of the preceding line (20:8), antithetic.

There are a number of different types of parallelism, and may involve 4 lines or more.

Prophetic or Poetic? About half of N.T. references to Messiah prophecies are from Psalms. Only Isaiah has more direct prophecies about Jesus than Psalms.

Remember 102:18---book is written FOR US today

New Testament or Old Testament? Psalms deals extensively with forgiveness of sin by grace, forgiving others that 'owe us', the existence of angels, and believers' conduct.

And, importantly, they give the believer the opportunity to 'vent' with appropriate displays of emotions, frustrations, and the need to carry all that to our Savior.

They comfort the lonely (Ps 73 for example), the grieving (Ps 23), the misunderstood (Ps 7), those that find repentance and healing (Ps 32).

And, like all the other books, they lead us right to the cross of Christ.