

THE PSALMS

the who, what, where, when, and why
of our most famous worship songs



Take it... one note ...at a time.



who?

AUTHORS OF THE PSALMS

- **David** **73**
- **Asaph** **12**
 - ↑ King David's worship leader
- **Sons of Korah** **11**
 - ↑ musicians/singers
- **Anonymous** **50**
- **Minor contributors:**
Solomon, Moses, Ethan & Heman

what?

CONTENT OF THE PSALMS

Name	<i>psalmoi</i> (Greek; "songs sung on a harp")
Form	Musical lyrics, poetry
Tone	Lament, praise
Theme	Worship, emotion, prayer, prophecy

where?

GEOGRAPHY OF THE PSALMS

The Exodus
(Egypt, Sinai desert)

Kingdoms of Israel & Judah

Exile & post-exile
(Babylon, Persia)

when?

TIMELINE OF THE PSALMS

circa 1440 BC

1046 – 586 BC

587 – 444 BC

(dates approximate)

why?

PURPOSE OF THE PSALMS

To understand the purpose of the Psalms, we must study their content (the **what).**

And to do this, the Psalms should be understood as a **collection of writings, to be read in their entirety from **end to end**.**

collection

ARRANGEMENT OF THE PSALMS

Book 1	psalms (1,2) 3-41	David
Book 2	psalms 42-72	David
Book 3	psalms 73-89	Exile
Book 4	psalms 90-106	Messiah
Book 5	psalms 107-145 (146-150)	Messiah

collection

ARRANGEMENT OF THE PSALMS

Books 1-4 all end with very similar proclamations:

**Praise the Lord, the God of Israel,
who lives from everlasting to everlasting.**

...

Praise his glorious name forever!

collection

ARRANGEMENT OF THE PSALMS

Book 5 ends with the same command:

Praise the Lord! or Hallelujah!

hallel + Jah

collection

ARRANGEMENT OF THE PSALMS

² But they delight in the **law** of the Lord,
meditating on it day and night.

³ They are like **trees** planted along the riverbank,
bearing **fruit** each season.

Their leaves **never wither**,
and they **prosper** in all they do.

Psalm 1

⁶ For the Lord declares, "I have placed **my chosen king** on the
throne in Jerusalem, on my holy mountain."

¹² Submit to **God's royal son**...

Psalm 2

collection

ARRANGEMENT OF THE PSALMS

It's critical that we understand that this collection of prayers revolves around honoring **God's law** and anticipating a **Messianic king**.

How do we read the Psalms?

PRACTICAL TOOLS

- **Laments**
- **Praises**
- **Chiasms**
- **Imprecations**
- **Statements**

Laments

- **Prayers for help**
- **Expressions of sadness and desire**
- **Not laments for physical deaths**
- **More commonly found earlier in the Psalms**
- **These laments teach us it is acceptable to own our difficult emotions, to speak our doubts, angers, and griefs; and to share them with God.**

Laments

**1 O Lord, why do you stand so far away?
Why do you hide when I am in trouble?
Psalm 10**

**24 Why do you look the other way?
Why do you ignore our suffering and
oppression?
Psalm 44**

Praises

- **Prayers of exaltation**
- **Expressions of glory and worship**
- **Trend towards the end of Psalms, and outweigh the laments in quantity**
- **These praises teach us to be vocal and outward with our worship to God; and to project with hope for the Messianic glory which is not yet around us.**

Praises

⁴ You **thrill me**, Lord, with all you have done for me!

I sing for joy because of what you have done.

⁵ O Lord, what **great works** you do!

And how deep are your thoughts.

Psalm 92

¹¹ **Why am I discouraged?**

Why is my heart so sad?

I will put my hope in God!

I will praise him again—

my Savior and my God!

Psalm 42

Chiasms

- Contemporary readers expect a linear “A-to-B” progression of thought, resulting in a moral **at the end**
- Chiasms (or chiastic psalms) work up to the moral at the **center** of the poem, and backtrack the thoughts in reverse order (A-B-**C**-B-A)
- Look closely at the implication
- Greek character **χ** chi

Psalm 8

**1 O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth!
Your glory is higher than the heavens.**

**3 When I look at the night sky and see the work of your
fingers—**

the moon and the stars you set in place—

**4 what are mere mortals that you should think
about them, human beings that you should care
for them?**

**7 the flocks and the herds
and all the wild animals,**

**8 the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea,
and everything that swims the ocean currents.**

9 O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth!

Chiasms

Spatial diagram of chiastic thoughts in Psalm 8:

Vs. 1*2	A		(God's majestic name)
Vs. 2*3		B	(Creation)
Vs. 4-7		C	(Humanity's status)
Vs. 6-8		B	(Creation)
Vs. 9	A		(God's majestic name)

Imprecations (Curses)

**⁶ Make their path dark and slippery,
with the angel of the Lord pursuing them.**

Psalm 35

**⁸ May they be like snails that dissolve into slime,
like a stillborn child who will never see the sun.**

Psalm 58

**¹³ Destroy them in your anger!
Wipe them out completely!
Then the whole world will know
that God reigns in Israel.**

Psalm 59

Imprecations (Curses)

- Prayers for devastation
- Cries for righteousness and justice amidst evil and suffering
- Imprecations are raw and emotional, from the soul; but are **never personal**. They are always about God mobilizing good against evil, beyond us.
- Consider: **Retribution principle**
- Consider: "Fire from heaven" vs. **"Thy kingdom come"**

Statements

- These verses read like **HEADLINES!** to our souls
- Take note when these statements seem to pop out and command your attention
- These verses **teach us** wisdom and beliefs about God

Statements

**4 Don't sin by letting anger control you.
Think about it overnight and remain silent.**

**10 In peace I will lie down and sleep,
for you alone, O Lord, will keep me safe.
Psalm 4**

**12 For he who avenges murder cares for the helpless.
He does not ignore the cries of those who suffer.
Psalm 9**

Be brave. Be honest.

Embrace the pain, joy, and glory.

Let them drive your hope in Jesus.