

100 DAYS

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE ENTIRE BIBLE

Together
In The Word

PSALMS

General Overview: The book of Psalms (or the Psalter) is a collection of poems, songs, and prayers. It includes prayers of lament and songs of praise. It is honest about the full spectrum of human emotion. And it is explicitly God-centered, as it teaches readers to shape their emotions through the theological lens of the sovereign God of the universe who has promised to bless the nations and crush evil through the Davidic Messianic King. With all that said, the Psalter is not a random collection of writings thrown together in a book. Rather, it is very intentionally ordered with the intent of expressing Israel's history and anticipated salvation through song.

Date and Authors: The composition of the individual Psalms range from Moses (see Psalm 90), who lived in the 1,400's B.C., all the way down to after the return from exile (early 500's B.C.). Thus the dates stretch across 900 years, but the bulk (at least 73) of the Psalms were written by David (who lived 1,000 B.C.).

Genre: The Psalms introduce a new genre of literature and a new section in the Hebrew Bible (the order we are following). The first section is the Torah (Genesis - Deuteronomy). The word "torah" means law with an emphasis on instruction or teaching. The first five books certainly include lots of history, but the emphasis is on the law of the Lord that has been given to His chosen people. The second section is the Prophets (Joshua - Malachi), which record a history of Israel through the lens of the Torah (i.e. see how God has been faithful to His promises, see how Israel has failed to obey the Torah, and lots of preaching from the prophets to remember and obey the Torah). This background is incredibly important for understanding the purpose of the Psalms (and the rest of the Wisdom literature). The Psalms are not merely random poems meant to encourage you when you are having a bad day. The Psalms are a meditation on and celebration of the Torah, and a Holy Spirit inspired poetic retelling of Israel's history, with an emphasis on the hope that Israel has because of the Messiah. Thus the perspective of the psalmists is that theology is so relevant to your personal situation that your emotions can be shaped from lament to praise if you delight in the law of the Lord and long for the Messiah.

How to Read the Psalms Consecutively: Psalm 1 and 2 can be read together, as Psalm 1 begins with the promise of blessing for those who delight in the Torah, and Psalm 2 ends with the promise of blessing for those who take refuge in the Messiah. These two Psalms form an introduction and framework by which readers ought to read the rest of the Psalter. The Psalter is broken up into 5 Books: Book 1 (1-41), Book 2 (42-72), Book 3 (73-89) Book 4 (90-106), and Book 5 (107-150). Look for the theme of God's Word and God's Messiah to be central and developed

throughout each of the 5 books. God's people sing God's praises because of the gracious gift of the Torah, and the hope of the coming Messianic King who will be the perfect keeper of the Torah and establisher of a heavenly Kingdom where the Law of the Lord is enforced and obeyed. Thus look for the themes of God's Word and God's Messiah throughout, and see how the authors connect these themes to their present situations and allow them to shape their view of their sin within and the broken world around them.

The Overarching Message: Taking all of the above information into account enables us to construct the overarching message of the Psalter. Songs of praise are sprinkled throughout the first 3 Books (1-89), however they are outnumbered by prayers of lament. But there is a shift in Books 4 and 5 (90-150) where praise songs far outnumber lament, which culminates at the end with Psalms 145-150 each beginning and ending with the command to sing Hallelujah (which means "praise Yahweh"). This shift from lament to praise is profound, as the Psalms are honest about the hardships of life. So how do we get there? How do we get from lament to praise? The order of the Psalms is the key.

Books 1 & 2: The majority of Books 1 and 2 consist of Davidic Psalms that were prompted from specific situations that took place during David's life (many of which can be read about in 1 and 2 Samuel).

Book 3: Book 2 ends with a Psalm from Solomon, and Book 3 contains the Psalms about the exile, and ends with a Psalm lamenting the apparent end of the Davidic monarchy (Psalm 89). Thus it has been suggested that Books 1 and 2 give poetic commentary on the life of David, the transition from Book 2 to 3 marks the beginning of the reign of Solomon, and Book 3 sings the story of Solomon to exile.

Book 4: Book 4 is a response to the reality of the exile, and it starts with a Psalm written by Moses. The point is to encourage Israel to consider how God rescued their sinful ancestors from slavery in Egypt in order to give them hope for a second Exodus from exile.

Book 5: Considering the faithfulness of God moves readers into Book 5, which contains more Davidic Psalms. But these Davidic Psalms are not linked to certain recorded events in David's life. It is as if they are pointing to the future David, the promised Son of David. These Psalms sing about the Messiah who will keep the law perfectly, establish justice, crush evil, sit on David's throne, and warrant the praises of God's people and all of creation for ever and ever. Thus the transition from lament to praise is rooted in delighting in the law of the Lord, which points to the promised Davidic King.