

## OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

### Psalms

#### Introduction

- "Psalm" derived from *psalmos* (Greek: "song" or "plucking" [a stringed instrument])
  - Anthology of songs/poetry
- Hebrew title: Tehillim ("*praises*")
- Collection of praises and prayers of the people of God
  - "the hymnbook of ancient Israel"
  - not just human songs/poems/prayers/praise, but inspired by God - not just Man's words, but God's Word
  - teach us how we relate to God through the spectrum of human life and experience, both individually and corporately
    - who God is
    - who we are as human beings
    - how we should relate to God through different circumstances of life - struggles and triumphs, joys and sorrows
      - give proper direction & expression to our emotions as our minds and hearts are shaped by God's Word --> shape our thoughts and feelings to relate rightly to God

#### Psalms - Overview

- Structure of Psalms
  - Comprised of ~150 individual psalms
    - several may originally have been single poems that were subsequently separated
      - e.g. Psalm 9&10 - together form a single acrostic (grouped as 1 Psalm in the Septuagint)
      - e.g. Psalm 42 & 43 - recurring refrain (42:5,11; 43:5)
  - divided into 5 books, each ending with a doxology
    - perhaps reflecting the 5 books of the Law of Moses (Genesis-Deuteronomy)
      - Book I - Psalm 1-41
      - Book II - Psalm 42-72
      - Book III - Psalm 73-89
      - Book IV - Psalms 90-106
      - Book V - Psalms 107-150
    - dating of the books not entirely certain
      - compiled and arranged over time
      - books I & II may have been earlier, with III-V coming later
        - e.g. Psalm 72:20 - "The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended."
        - but psalms of David (e.g. 101, 103, 108) appear in books III-V
      - final form some time in the post-exilic period, before the Septuagint translation (3rd to 2nd century BC)
  - Psalms 1 & 2 form something of an introduction that provides a framework/context within which the Psalms operate
    - Psalm 1

- speaks of the importance of meditating on God's Law
      - a portrait of the righteous man - living in obedience to and under the blessing of God - in contrast to the wicked; life as it was meant to be - a picture of the Garden of Eden ("like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season")
    - Psalm 2
      - a portrait of the sovereign rule of God and His Anointed One over all the earth in the face of human rebellion --> a call to submission to Him
  - Concludes with 5 exuberant psalms of praise (146-150)
    - each begins and ends with *Hallelujah* ("Praise the LORD")
    - a summary of our 'chief end' as God's people
    - a summary of the reasons why we praise God
- Authorship and historical context of the Psalms
  - historical context of a few psalms indicated in the psalm itself
    - e.g. Psalm 137 - "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion.... For there our captors required of us songs..." (v.1,3) - a psalm of the Exile
  - "superscriptions" or titles of psalms
    - most psalms have titles or superscriptions that provide some information about the author and/or context in which the psalm was written
      - e.g. Psalm 51: "To the Choirmaster. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the Prophet Went to Him, After He Had Gone in to Bathsheba"
      - some uncertainty regarding whether the titles always indicate the author
        - e.g. "Of David" - preposition translated "of" could possibly also be translated "by", "about", or "for"
    - some appear in the earliest available manuscripts; others appear to have been added later
      - some controversy regarding whether they should be regarded as original/canonical
  - accepting the titles as reliable, the psalms were composed by multiple authors, over the span of ~1000 years (from Moses to exilic/post-exilic)
    - 73 psalms attributed to David
    - Asaph - one of David's choir leaders (1 Chronicles 16:5) - 12 psalms
    - the sons of Korah (also members of Levitical choir) - 11 psalms
    - Solomon - 2 psalms
    - Heman (associate of Asaph) - 1 psalm
    - Etan (Ethan) - 1 psalm
    - Moses - 1 psalm
- Types of Psalms
  - ancient classification with different types of psalms suggested by the superscriptions of some Psalms (e.g. Psalm 16 - "A miktam of David"; Psalm 32 - "A maskil of David"; etc.)
    - meaning of some of these terms is uncertain
  - Psalms are also often categorized based on their content
    - Multiple different categories (depending on who is doing the categorizing)
    - Types of psalms include

- Psalms of praise (e.g. 100, 146-150)
  - Psalms of lament (e.g. 4, 5, 6, 10, 12, 13, ...)
  - Psalms of thanksgiving (e.g. 9, 30, 34, 118, 138)
  - Psalms of trust/confidence (e.g. 11, 16, 23, 91, 139)
  - Psalms of remembrance (e.g. 78, 105, 106)
  - Royal/Kingship psalms (e.g. 2, 20, 45, 72, 110)
  - Wisdom psalms/psalms of instruction (e.g. 1, 119)
  - Psalms of Zion (e.g. 46, 48, 76, 84)
  - Songs of ascent (pilgrimage psalms) - 120-134
- The 3 major types are praise, lament, and thanksgiving psalms
- sometimes referred to as songs of orientation (praise), disorientation (lament), and reorientation (thanksgiving)
  - Praise psalms (e.g. Psalm 117)
    - hymns of praise to God
    - "songs of orientation" - what we should be doing as God's people
    - scattered throughout the Psalms, and dominate the tone of the Psalms, even though there are more lament psalms than praise psalms
      - the Hebrew name for the book of Psalms is *Tehillim* - "praises"
      - the book of Psalms climaxes with 5 praise psalms (146-150)
    - may be further subcategorized by reasons for praising God
  - Lament psalms (e.g. Psalm 5)
    - the largest number of psalms are in this category
    - "songs of disorientation"
      - express grief, anguish, internal conflict, frustration in the face of trouble
      - arise from the realities of life in a fallen world
    - troubles may arise from within (e.g. sickness - Psalm 6), or perhaps more often, from enemies (e.g. Psalm 3, 4, 5, 7, ...)
    - often express a sense of distance from God, or feelings of abandonment by Him (e.g. 13)
    - typically include several basic elements (but not necessarily in every lament psalm): e.g. read and consider Psalm 5
      - Invocation - calling on God (5:1)
      - Plea to God for help/deliverance (5:1-3)
      - Complaint (5:4-6, 9)
      - Confession of sin, or assertion of innocence (5:7-8)
      - Curse upon enemies/calling on God to judge them (5:10)
      - Expression of confidence in God and His response (5:11-12)
      - Praise and/or thanksgiving (5:11-12)
  - Thanksgiving psalms (e.g. Psalm 118)
    - "songs of reorientation"
      - expressions of gratitude to God for what He has done - generally deliverance from trials/answered prayer
    - typically recounts of the trouble that the Psalmist faced, and of how God saved him, followed by thanksgiving

## Some Major Themes and Concepts in Psalms

- God
  - His greatness and glory
  - His might and power
    - in Creation
    - in protecting and saving His people
  - His sovereignty over all things
  - His holiness, righteousness, and justice
  - His transcendence and His immanence
  - His goodness and mercy
  - His steadfast faithfulness and trustworthiness
  - His loving care and concern for His Creation, and in particular for His people
  - His abundant generosity
  - His Word
  - His Anointed One
  - His holy city (Zion)
  
- Man
  - Our place before God, as His creation
    - Our utter dependence on Him
    - Our responsibility to Him
    - The appropriateness of praise and thanksgiving to Him
  
  - Our response to God and relationship with God
    - praise and thanksgiving - declaring/proclaiming His greatness
    - delighting in Him and in His Word
    - obedience to His commands
    - laments and cries to God in the face of hardship and suffering
    - trust and confidence in Him

--> teaches us how rightly to pray and relate to God in the full spectrum of circumstances we face in life

    - give proper direction & expression to our emotions as our minds and hearts are shaped by God's Word --> shape our thoughts and feelings to relate rightly to God
  
  - The righteous and the wicked
    - what characterizes them
    - the paradox of the wicked prospering while the righteous suffer
    - their ultimate destiny

## Glimpses of Christ in Psalms

- The Psalms were widely used and quoted by Jesus Christ and by the New Testament writers
  
- Psalms speaking about Jesus Christ - His identity and role as God's Anointed, but also various aspects of His life, death, and resurrection - "Messianic" psalms
  - "Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.'" (Luke 24:44)

- e.g. Psalm 2 - speaks of the nations conspiring against God's anointed, God's Son, but of His triumph over them
  - Acts 4:25-28 quotes Psalm 2:1-2, and applies it to Herod and Pontius Pilate conspiring with the Gentiles and the people of Israel against Jesus Christ
  - Hebrews 1:5 quotes Psalm 2:7, speaking of Jesus as the Son of God
  - In Revelation 2:27, Jesus Christ quotes Psalm 2:9, to speak of the authority He received from the Father to rule the nations
- some other psalms that speak of the Messiah include
  - Psalm 8: all things put under Christ's feet (v.4-6, cf. Hebrews 2:5-9)
  - Psalm 16 - resurrection of Christ (v.9-11, cf. Acts 2:25-28)
  - Psalm 22 - the Passion - "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"
  - Psalm 45 - an everlasting throne (v.6-7, cf. Hebrews 1:8-9)
  - Psalm 69 - references to events surrounding Christ's crucifixion
  - Psalm 72 - a ruler who will reign from sea to sea
  - Psalm 110 - a victorious king, and priest in the order of Melchizedek
- Psalms as the words and prayers of Jesus Christ
  - the words of Jesus Christ, spoken prophetically through the Psalmist
  - either were spoken by Jesus Christ
    - e.g. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46; cf. Psalm 22:1)
    - e.g. "Into your hands I commit my spirit." (Luke 23:46; cf. Psalm 31:5)
    - e.g. "They hated me without a cause" (John 15:25; cf. Psalm 35:19; 69:4)
  - or express a sentiment that characterized Him
    - e.g. "Zeal for your house consumes me" (Psalm 69:9; cf. John 2:17), of Jesus clearing out the temple

## References & Resources

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