

INTRO:

As we work through the theology of Psalms, please note with me: Your responses to God reflect your understanding of his person and work on your behalf!

“The book of Psalms is a collection of literary items written over some centuries by a number of different authors and generally devotional in tone.”¹

“The psalms have remained a central fixture for corporate worship and private devotion over the centuries.”²

“If the Bible’s narrative materials relate what God has done and the prophetic literature reports what God has said, the Psalms present the response of the people to the acts and words of God.”³

Interesting to Note that there are a couple of Duplicate Psalms:

“There are, of course, many minor duplications, but the major psalm duplicates are the following:

Psalm 14 = Psalm 53, Psalm 18 = 2 Samuel 22, Psalm 31:1–3 = Psalm 71:1–3,
Psalm 40:13–17 = Psalm 70, Psalm 57:7–11 = Psalm 108:1–5,
Psalm 60:5–12 = Psalm 108:6–13”⁴

Structure of the Psalms: Seems to be a Psalm primarily composed of a chiasm, not an acrostic or stanzas (Strophes).

Nature of Hebrew Poetry:

Hebrew poetry is not based on rhyme and meter as we often think of with English poetry. It is instead based on parallelism. There are several types of parallelism used throughout Hebrew poetry: Synonymous, Synthetic, Antithetic, Emblematic, and Staircase (Climactic). Only two of these types of parallelism occur in this Psalm: Synonymous and Synthetic.

- Synonymous – equivalence of meaning between lines
- Synthetic – development of meaning from one line to the next
- Antithetic – contrast of meaning between lines

¹ G. W. Grogan, “[Psalms](#),” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 203.

² W. D. Tucker Jr., “[Psalms 1: Book Of](#),” ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings* (Downers Grove, IL; Nottingham, England: IVP Academic; Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 578.

³ James Limburg, “[Psalms, Book of](#),” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 522.

⁴ C. Hassell Bullock, [Psalms 1–72](#), ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, vol. 1, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015), 97.

- Emblematic – the meaning of the first line is repeated in the second as a metaphor or simile
- Staircase (Climactic) – a part of the first line is repeated in the second verbatim in the next, causing anticipation

Authors throughout the Psalms:

Obviously, we all understand that the Psalms were not written by just one author. We also know that David wrote many of them or they were dedicated to him. Some of the Psalms are not attributed to anyone, just recorded for us.

The Various Authors include: David – 73 (3-9, 11-32, 34-41, 51-65, 68-70, 86, 101, 103, 108-110, 122, 124, 131, 133, 138-145); Asaph – 12 (50, 73-83); Sons of Korah – 11 (42, 44-49, 84-85, 87-88); Solomon – 2 (72, 127); Moses – 1 (90); Heman the Ezrahite – 1 (88); Ethan the Ezrahite – 1 (89).⁵

Divisions of the Book of Psalms:

There are 5 divisions within the book of Psalms. There are several very fascinating attributes to note throughout these 5 books. One is the organization of the books. Each book concludes with a doxology before going into the next. It is thought by some that these were added when the books were put together. “You will note that each book concludes with a similar doxology (41:13; 72:18-19; 89:52; 106:48; and the whole of 150).”⁶ Another special feature is the manner in which the names of God occur in each one of these books. There is a myriad of reasons given for this, but no one solid, definitive reason.

“The use of the divine names “Lord” (YHWH) and “God” (*'elohim*) in the Psalms is a complex issue. In Book 1 YHWH occurs 278 times, and *'elohim* 15. Books 4 and 5 use YHWH 339 times and *'elohim* 9, obviously a predominance of YHWH. But Psalms 42–83 (Book 2 and part of Book 3) exhibit a preference for *'elohim*. Because of that, these forty-two psalms have been called the Elohistic Psalter. They contain *'elohim* 200 times and YHWH 44 times, quite a reversal of the pattern in Books 1 (Pss. 1–41) and 4 and 5 (Pss. 90–150). The Elohistic Psalter is dominated by the first Korah collection (Pss. 42–49) and an Asaph collection (Pss. 50; 73–83). In the first collection of Korah psalms, *'elohim* occurs 51 times, as compared to 9 for YHWH, while the numbers for the Asaph collection are 55 for *'elohim* and 14 for YHWH, with 4 occurrences of the divine name *'adonay*, a substitute for YHWH. In comparison, the second Korah collection (Pss. 84–85; 87–88), which may not have come under northern-kingdom influences and do not

⁵ This list is adapted in its entirety from C. Hassell Bullock. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1988), 119.

⁶ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas K. Stuart, [*How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 131.

belong to the Elohist Psalter, turns the numbers around, with 17 occurrences of *YHWH* and 10 of *'elohim*."⁷

Another very interesting pattern to note is the authorship of the 5 books.

“Book 1 Psalms 1–41: All but 1, 2, and 33 titled “of David”

Book 2 Psalms 42–72: Psalms 42–50 “of the sons of Korah” or “of Asaph”; Psalms 51–70 “of David”; concluding with one “of Solomon” (72; note that 71 is untitled), with a coda at the end, “This concludes the prayers of David son of Jesse”

Book 3 Psalms 73–89: All titled, mostly “of Asaph” or “of the sons of Korah”

Book 4 Psalms 90–106: Mostly untitled, except for 101 and 103 (“of David”)

Book 5 Psalms 107–150: Mostly untitled, but fifteen are “of David,” including Psalms 138–145; also includes fifteen “songs of ascent” (120–134) and concludes with five “Hallelujah” psalms (146–150)”⁸

As you can see from these examples, the 5 books within the Psalms can help us better understand the layout and themes and make sense of context which will always help us to do a better job interpreting. Our goal must always be to understand better what God is trying to communicate with us in the word!

Types of Psalms:

Throughout the book of Psalms there are a variety of Psalms that address various issues related to those who believe in and trust God! Essentially this is a catalogue of each Psalm and its primary theme. Now, this can be different at times depending on who is evaluating the Psalm. So, some of these categories will have the same Psalms. For the most part, each Psalm has distinctive enough characteristics that it can be distinguished or labeled into one of these groups.

Psalms of Praise

These Psalms offer praise to God for his works, for his person and characteristics, as well as his deliverance! God is worthy of our praise and each of these Psalms offer rich praises to God.

⁷ C. Hassell Bullock, [Psalms 1–72](#), ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, vol. 1, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015), 322.

⁸ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas K. Stuart, [How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 131.

Psalms 8, 19, 29, 33, 47, 65, 66a, 68, 93, 96-100, 104-106, 111, 113-114, 117, 135-136, 145-150⁹

Psalms of Wisdom

These Psalms often reflect on the problems of life and possibilities that can come in life and how we should respond to them in light of God, in light of who he is and all that he does for us! Psalms 1, 19, 37, 49, 73, 112, 119, 127, 128, 133.¹⁰ Others may also include Psalm 50, 78 in this wisdom category.

Psalms of Trust

“When the *affirmation of trust* dominates, the psalm may be called an Individual Psalm of Trust: 11; 16; 23; 27; 62; 63; 131.¹¹” Also, some would add Psalm 91 to these Psalms of Trust.

Psalms of Thanksgiving

These Psalms focus, often corporately, on the deliverance of God. God has responded and rescued his people and they are now responding with thanksgiving to him! Psalms 18; 30; 32; (34); 40:1–10; 66:13–20; 92; 116; 118; and 138.¹²

Psalms of the King, the Coming King, the Messiah

These Psalms are connected with the life or the events of the King’s life. It is easy to see how these Psalms can be interpreted or understood as prophetic words of the coming Messiah, who remember, would be from the line of David. This was part of the commitment God made to David in his covenant with him.

Psalms 2, 18, 20-21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 144

Liturgical Psalms or Hymns

These Psalms can often have a feeling of conversation. Rhetorical questions being answered by the collective group of God’s people responding together and rehearsing his mighty acts on their behalf. Psalms 15, 24, 50, (68), 81, (82), 95, 115, 132.¹³ Others include all of the Psalms from 120-134 in this group as well.¹⁴

⁹ Adapted from C. Hassell Bullock, Psalms 1–72, ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, vol. 1, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015), 3.

¹⁰ James Limburg, [“Psalms, Book of,”](#) ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 533.

¹¹ James Limburg, 532.

¹² James Limburg, 532.

¹³ James Limburg, 533.

¹⁴ David Witthoff, Kristopher A. Lyle, and Matt Nerdahl. *Psalms Form and Structure*. Edited by Eli Evans. Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2014.

Psalms of Lament

As you can see by the following list, this is the largest group of Psalms in the book! Every single one of the five books have at least one Lament Psalm.

“The Individual Laments arise from a variety of situations of individual crisis. Included in this category are:

Book I: 3-7; 9-10; 13; (14); 17; 22; 25; 26; 28; 31; 35; (36); 38; (39); 40:11-17; 41;

Book II: 42-43; 51; (52); (53); 54-59; 61; 64; 69; 70; 71;

Book III: 77; 86; 88;

Book IV: 102;

Book V: 109; 120; 130; 140-43

Like the Communal Laments, the typical elements in the Individual Lament are:

(a) the *address* (13:1, “O Lord”; 22:1; “My God, my God”);

(b) the *complaint* in three forms, with the subject “I” (13:2a; 22:2, 6, 14-15, 17a), “thou” (13:1; 22:1), or “they” (13:2c; 22:7-8, 12-13, 16, 17b-18);

(c) the *request for help* (13:3-4; 22:11, 19-21);

(d) the *affirmation of trust* (13:5; 22:3-5, 9-10);

(e) the *vow to praise God* when the crisis is past (13:6; 22:22-31).¹⁵

There are other divisions here that we could address, but they really cross over into the divisions that we have already listed. For instance, there are many Psalms that focus on the Torah, the Law of God. “The three psalms devoted to the Torah are Psalms 1; 19; and 119. Many other psalms express Torah theology: Psalms 18; 25; 33; 78; 89; 93; 94; 99; 103; 105; 111; 112; 147; and 148.”¹⁶ Another possible category could be Creation Psalms – 8, 24, 33. It is fascinating to note that each of these Psalms is followed by an acrostic Psalm 9/10, 25, 34. This speaks to the orderly design of our God, but also speaks to his divine plan! God is at work in the affairs and events of humanity – every day!

Again, these divisions help us to better understand and interpret the Psalms as we work through them.

Attributes and Character of God throughout the Psalms:

The Psalms overflow with the attributes and characteristics of God that cause our hearts to rejoice in everything that he is to us as believers, to us as his people! [For a much more in depth look at the attributes of God, you can look the Attributes of God Handout on our Website]

¹⁵ James Limburg, 532.

¹⁶ C. Hassell Bullock, [Psalms 1-72](#), ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, vol. 1, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015), 135.

Eternal - Psalm 102:26-28

God has always been and will always be!! God is not constrained by time.

Immutable - Psalm 33:11

God is unchangeable. He cannot become something tomorrow that He wasn't already today! This is a unique attribute to God, because as human beings we change so much. From birth to death consider the changes. God never changes! This is an unbelievable blessing when you consider it!

Infinity - Psalm 139:7-12

God is not constrained by space. Webster defines this as, *"lacking limits or bounds; extending beyond measure or comprehension: without beginning or end; endless"*.¹⁷

Transcendent - Psalm 145:3

Transcend means to go above, to rise above or to be above. Transcendence is the idea that God is above all things.

Omnipresent (present everywhere, at all times) - Psalm 139:7-12

The ability to be present everywhere all of the time. "...the unlimited nature of God or His ability to be everywhere at all times."¹⁸

Omniscience (Divine-Wisdom) - Psalm 147:5

God knows all things past, present and future. Realities that are hidden from human sight and understanding are still known by God. The Bible stresses the wisdom of God in every one of his actions and often this wisdom functions as a foundation for the all-encompassing knowledge of God.

Omnipotence (all-powerful) - Psalm 18:14

God is all-powerful! He is able to do whatever he wills. His power is limited only by his character.

Sovereign - Psalm 103:19-22, 115:3, 135:6

The fact that God is free and able to do all that he wills; that he reigns over all creation and that his will is the final cause of all things. This is often expressed in the language of kingship. Nothing is too hard for our God; nothing is overwhelming to our God and nothing surprises our God!

God is Just - Psalm 9:8, 68:21-23, 72:2, 96:10, 110:6, 135:14

¹⁷ Merriam-Webster, Inc. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003.

¹⁸ Ronald F. Youngblood, F. F. Bruce, and R. K. Harrison, Thomas Nelson Publishers, eds., *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1995).

God is Righteous - Psalm 19:8-9, 33:4, 48:10, 97:2, 119:137, 119:7, 119:142, 119:144, 145:17

God is Holy - Psalm 18:30, 99:5

“Holiness refers primarily to the quality of God, denoting his transcendent apartness from the rest of creation, his uniqueness, and his total purity.”¹⁹

God is True Psalm 31:5, 33:4, 119:151, 119:160

God’s unique integrity is displayed in his perfection of character and attributes. God true to his commitments! Because God is truth, you can trust him!

God is Merciful (Kindness, Loving-Kindness) – Psalm 5:7, 6:9, 25:6, 103:17, 106:1, 119:132, 145:17

Compassion of God on those who are hurting, suffering or miserable. God keeps his promises to them and is faithful to his commitments to them, even when they fail or are unworthy.

God is Patient (Longsuffering) - Psalm 50:20-21, 78:38, 86:15, 103:8, 145:8

God shows forbearance in his character, decisions and actions. Above all, he waits patiently for people to turn to him for help and salvation.

Hesed – God’s Loving-Loyalty, Longsuffering, Mercy - Psalm 6:4, Psalm 136

This term is a very close synonym with both mercy and faithfulness. It is significant because it speaks so clearly to the covenant-loyalty, covenant-love and the overall commitment of God to his people! God never leaves, he never fails his own!

God is Good – Psalm 31:19

God is Faithful – Psalm 89:33

God’s perfect loyalty and consistency in being true to his name, his character and his word.

God is Love – Psalm 26:3, 33:18, 33:22

Often seen in connection with his loyal love, steadfast love, faithful love!

Psalms is filled with this one! It is often translated from the word *Hesed*, which we looked at above.

The deepest possible expression of the character of God. Though God loves all people, he is especially committed to sacrificial, loyal relationships with his people. You are loved by God! You can rest in his love and in his care for you today!

¹⁹ “Holiness,” ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

Responses to God given throughout the Psalms:

One of the most important aspects of the Psalms is the fact that they are an expression of our human responses to God! He is worthy of our praise!

Faith – believe

¹¹ *I will remember the Lord's works; yes, I will remember your ancient wonders.* ¹² *I will reflect on all you have done and meditate on your actions.* Psalm 77:11-12 (CSB)

Obedience – follow God, submission

“The submissive trust which the psalmist puts in the Lord is nowhere more movingly expressed than in Psalm 131”²⁰

¹ *Lord, my heart is not proud; my eyes are not haughty. I do not get involved with things too great or too wondrous for me.* ² *Instead, I have calmed and quieted my soul like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like a weaned child.* Psalm 131:1-2 (CSB)

Lament – God cares about our sorrows; he cares when we are hurting or struggling!

A call for help!

¹ *Help, Lord, for no faithful one remains; the loyal have disappeared from the human race.* Psalm 12:1 (CSB)

Trust – genuinely rest in the reality that he can care for your every need, no matter what it may be!

³ *Trust in the Lord and do what is good; dwell in the land and live securely.* ⁴ *Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart's desires.* ⁵ *Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act,* ⁶ *making your righteousness shine like the dawn, your justice like the noonday.* Psalm 37:3-6 (CSB)

²⁰ Tremper Longman III, [*How to Read the Psalms*](#) (Downers Grove, IL; Nottingham, England: IVP Academic; Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 31.

Thanks and Praise for the response of God –

¹ *I will exalt you, Lord, because you have lifted me up and have not allowed my enemies to triumph over me.* ² *Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you healed me.* ³ *Lord, you brought me up from Sheol; you spared me from among those going down to the Pit.* Psalm 30:1-3 (CSB)

Worship and Praise –

¹ *Praise the Lord, all nations! Glorify him, all peoples!* ² *For his faithful love to us is great; the Lord's faithfulness endures forever. Hallelujah!* Psalm 117:1-2

Our praise should be done both personally and corporately! Several Psalms point to the reality of praising God for his work with his people! Psalms 42-43, 63, 84

As we have made our through the theology of Psalms, it is important for us to remember: our responses to God reflect our understanding of his person and work on your behalf!

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