

2008

# What You Need to Know About The Book of Psalms

Harold Willmington  
*Liberty University*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/will\\_know](http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/will_know)

---

## Recommended Citation

Willmington, Harold, "What You Need to Know About The Book of Psalms" (2008). *What You Need to Know About....* Paper 45.  
[http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/will\\_know/45](http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/will_know/45)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Willmington School of the Bible at DigitalCommons@Liberty University. It has been accepted for inclusion in What You Need to Know About... by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Liberty University. For more information, please contact [scholarlycommunication@liberty.edu](mailto:scholarlycommunication@liberty.edu).

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE BOOK OF PSALMS

Only eternity itself will reveal the untold number of grieving hearts that have been healed, fears that have been removed, feet that have been directed, and broken lives that have been mended simply through the reading of the Psalms. In fact, all these goals would have been obtained by reading the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm alone.

This book, the most lengthy one in Scripture, may be aptly summarized by five key words –

- (1) Praise: The Psalmist worships, extols, and with heart-filled gratitude, thanks the sovereign God of Israel for His Person, His Word, and His mighty works in regard to both creation and redemption.
- (2) Prophecy: The Psalmist often writes of the coming Messiah, foretelling His zeal, suffering, death, resurrection, ascension, high priestly work, and coming millennial reign.
- (3) Pain: The Psalmist describes in graphic fashion his personal doubts, fears, pain and problems.
- (4) Petition: The Psalmist offers up many requests, crying out for relief, forgiveness, reassurance, direction, protection and strength.
- (5) Poetry: The Psalmist pens his words in poetic fashion meant to be sung.

### **BOTTOM LINE INTRODUCTION**

THINK OF IT ... THE GREATEST COLLECTION OF SONGS EVER COMPOSED AND PRAYERS PRAYED ALL INCLUDED IN A SINGLE BOOK.

In no other writings, whether sacred or secular, are the heart and soul of man more clearly revealed than in the Psalms. The sighs, sobs, and songs buried deeply within human spirits find their release and utter their message through these 150 Psalms. They review the past, view the present, and preview the future.

Nearly half of all the direct quotes taken from the Old Testament and quoted in the New Testament come from the Psalms. In fact, the book of Psalms is either quoted from or alluded to 103 times in the book of Revelation alone, and 149 times in the four Gospel accounts.

Our Lord began and concluded his earthly ministry by quoting from the Psalms. Compare Psa. 69 with Jn. 2:17; Psa. 31:5 with Lk. 23:46.

### **FACTS REGARDING THE AUTHOR(S) OF THIS BOOK**

#### First Author

1. Who? **Moses**. He was the younger brother of Aaron and Miriam (Exod. 6:20; Num. 26:59) who led his people Israel out of Egyptian bondage (Exod. 5-14) and gave them the Law at Mt. Sinai (Exod. 20).
2. What? **Psalms 90**

3. When and where? 1405 B.C., from the eastern bank of the River Jordan in Moab
4. Why? To review Israel's sinfulness and God's faithfulness during the past 40 years
5. To whom? Israel in particular, all believers in general

#### Second Author

1. Who? **David**. He was the great-grandson of Boaz and Ruth (Ruth 4:21, 22), the son of Jesse (1 Sam. 16:11-13), husband of Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:26, 27), and father of Solomon (2 Sam. 12:24). This former shepherd (1 Sam. 16:11; 17:34, 35) and giant slayer (1 Sam. 17:49) would become Israel's greatest king (2 Sam. 5:1-5).
2. What? **Seventy-five Psalms**: 2-9, 11-32, 34-41, 51-65, 68-70, 86, 95, 101, 103, 108-110, 122, 124, 131, 133, and 138-145
3. When and where? Around 975 B.C., from Jerusalem
4. Why? Praising the person and power of God. Prophecies concerning the first and second coming of the Messiah.
5. To whom? All of Israel and all believers

#### Third Author

1. Who? **Solomon**. He was the son of David and Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12:24), Israel's third king (1 Kings 1:39), and the world's wisest man (1 Kings 3:5-12).
2. What? **Psalms 72, 127**
3. When and where? 935 B.C., from Jerusalem
4. Why?
  - Psalm 72: to describe the ultimate glories of the Messiah's kingdom
  - Psalm 127: to stress the importance of proper foundations
5. To whom? Possibly his son Rehoboam (Prov. 1:8) and all of Israel

#### Fourth Author

1. Who? **Asaph**. He was chief of the Levitical musicians appointed by David to oversee the song service in the tabernacle (1 Chr. 6:39; 16:4, 5; Neh. 12:46). (2 Kings 20:1-11).
2. What? **Twelve Psalms**: 50 and 73-83
3. When and where? Possibly around 740 B.C., from Jerusalem
4. Why? Trusting in God the righteous Judge, even in troublous times
5. To whom? Israel

#### Fifth Author

1. Who? **Hezekiah**. He was Judah's thirteenth king who saw Jerusalem saved by the death angel (2 Kings 19:35), and who was later given an additional 15 years to live (2 Kings 20:1-11)
2. What? **Ten Psalms**: 120, 121, 123, 125, 126, 128, 129, 130, 132, 134
3. When and where? 700 B.C., from Jerusalem
4. Why? To praise God for protecting both His people and His city (Jerusalem)
5. To whom? Israel

#### Sixth Author

1. Who? **Ethan.** He was a musician in the time of Solomon known for his wisdom (1 Kings 4:31; 1 Chr. 15:19)
2. What? **Psalms 89**
3. When and where? Possibly around 740 B.C., from Jerusalem
4. Why? To confirm and clarify the Davidic Covenant
5. To whom? The House of David concerning the coming Messiah

#### Seventh Author

1. Who? **Heman.** He was Samuel's grandson and one of three key Levitical musicians in the time of David (1 Chron. 6:31, 33)
2. What? **Psalms 88**
3. When and where? Possibly around 740 B.C., from Jerusalem
4. Why? To record the despair at times felt even by believers
5. To whom? All discouraged believers

#### Eighth Author(s)

1. Who? **Korah's sons.** They were the sons of Korah whose father was killed by God for his rebellion against Moses (Num. 16:1, 2, 31-33; 26:10, 11)
2. What? **10 Psalms:** 42, 44-49, 84, 85, and 87
3. When and where? Possibly around 740 B.C., from Jerusalem
4. Why? The glory of God, His temple, and His city
5. To whom? Israel

### KEY EVENTS

1. The fruitful tree and the worthless chaff
2. The Father's decree giving His son authority to rule over all
3. The glory of God and the dominion of man
4. Praising God for His works and words
5. Psalm of the Good Shepherd
6. Psalm of the Great Shepherd
7. Psalm of the Chief Shepherd
8. The wedding Psalm
9. David's confessional prayer
10. First of three Psalms overviewing Israel's history (105, 106)
11. Psalm of the Davidic Covenant
12. Psalm of Moses
13. Psalm of life
14. Greatest of the praise Psalms
15. Psalm of creation
16. Psalm of the Word of God
17. Psalm of the return from Babylon
18. Psalm of the Babylonian captivity
19. The attributes of God Psalm

### KEY INDIVIDUALS

1. **David:** Israel's greatest king, a man after God's own heart, the ultimate role model in the worship of God, who authored at least one half of the Psalms
2. **Moses:** Israel's great deliverer (from Egypt) and lawgiver (from God), who wrote Psalm 90
3. **Asaph:** appointed by both David and Solomon to oversee the song service in the temple, who wrote Psalms 50, 73-83
4. **Heman:** grandson of Samuel and a key musician during the reigns of David and Solomon, who wrote Psalm 88
5. **Ethan:** Levitical musician who led the worship service when David brought the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem, who would write Psalm 89
6. **Solomon:** David's son and successor, Israel's wisest king, who wrote Psalms 72, 127
7. **Sons of Korah:** descendants of the man who once led a rebellion against Moses (Num. 16), who wrote Psalms 42-49, 84-85, 87-88
8. **Hezekiah:** Judah's 13<sup>th</sup> king who may have written Psalms 120-121, 123, 125-126, 128-130, 132, 134 (see Isa. 38:20)

### UNIQUE FEATURES

1. The 150 psalms naturally fall into five main divisions or sections, with each group ending with a doxology. These divisions are:
  - Psalms 1-41
  - Psalms 42-72
  - Psalms 73-89
  - Psalms 90-106
  - Psalms 107-150
2. Some believe these five divisions in a general way reflect the main message expressed in the Pentateuch (first five books in the Bible) and were grouped accordingly. Note some examples from each of these stages:
  - Psalms 1-41 (corresponds to Genesis). The key word is *man*. "*Blessed is the man who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly*" (Psa. 1:1). "*What is man, that thou art mindful of him?*" (8:4). "*The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men*" (14:2). "*Verily, every man at his best state is altogether vanity*" (39:5).
  - Psalms 42-72 (corresponds to Exodus). The key word is *deliverance*. "*Thou art my king, O God; command deliverances for Jacob*" (44:4). "*For he hath delivered me out of all trouble*" (54:7). "*For thou hast delivered my soul from death*" (56:13). "*Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God*" (59:1). "*For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth*" (72:12).
  - Psalms 73-89 (corresponds to Leviticus). The key word is *sanctuary*. "*For I was envious . . . when I saw the prosperity of the wicked ... until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end*" (73:3, 17). "*Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary*" (77:13). "*And he built his sanctuary ... which he hath established forever*" (78:69).
  - Psalms 90-106 (corresponds to Numbers). The key words are *unrest* and *wandering*. Especially to be noted under this section are two entire psalms

which are given over to Israel's failures as recorded in the book of Numbers. These are Psalms 90 and 106.

- Psalms 107-150 (corresponds to Deuteronomy). The key word is the *Word of God*. "He sent his word and healed them"(107:20). "I waited for the LORD ... and in his word do I hope"(130:5). "Thou has magnified thy word"(138:2). In addition to these verses this final section contains the 119<sup>th</sup> Psalm, Scripture's longest chapter. It is totally given over to the Word of God. It is mentioned in 171 of the 176 verses in the chapter. The author gives the Bible nine titles in this psalm and ascribes some 12 ministries to it.

### 3. **Attributes of God Psalms:**

The following are just a few of the Psalms' descriptions of God:

- Eternality (90; 102)
- Glory (96; 113)
- Goodness (27; 107)
- Holiness (99)
- Justice (75; 82; 94)
- Majesty (18; 93; 97)
- Mercy (86; 136)
- Omnipotence (18; 33; 76; 146)
- Omnipresence (139)
- Omniscience (139, 147)
- Providential care (65; 104)
- Unfailing Love (36)
- Uniqueness (115, 135)

### 4. **Messianic Psalms:**

Passages from the Psalms reveal many things about the coming Messiah, including his:

- Creative power (102:25-27; Jn. 1:3, 10; Heb. 1:10-12)
- Obedience to the Father (40:6-8; Heb. 10:5-7)
- Zeal for the Father (69:9; Jn. 2:17)
- Faithfulness as a shepherd (23; Jn. 10)
- Rejection by Israel (118:22-23; Mt. 21:42)
- Praise by little children (8:2; Mt. 21:16)
- Betrayal by a friend:
  - a. the treachery of Judas (41:9; 55:12-14; Mt. 26:47-50; Jn. 13:18)
  - b. the tragedy of Judas (69:25; 109:6-8; Acts 1:18-20)
- Slander by false witnesses (27:12; 109:2-3; Mt. 26:59-61)
- Suffering and death:
  - a. forsaken by God (22:6-8; Mt. 27:39-43)
  - b. ridiculed (22:6-8; Mt. 27:39-43)
  - c. beaten (129:3; Jn. 19:1)
  - d. prayed for his enemies (109:4; Lk. 23:34)
  - e. hands and feet pierced (22:16; Lk. 24:39-40)
  - f. given sour wine to drink (69:21; Mt. 27:34, 48)
  - g. garments gambled for (22:18; Mt. 27:35)
  - h. none of his bones broken (34:20; Jn. 19:36)

- Resurrection (16:8-11; Mt. 28:1-6; Acts 2:25-32; 13:35)
  - Ascension (68:18; Lk. 24:50-51; Eph. 4:8)
  - Victorious entrance into heaven (24:7-10; Rev. 7:9-12)
  - High Priestly work (110:1, 4; Mt. 22:44; Heb. 5:6; 7:17)
  - Marriage to the church:
    - a. description of the bridegroom (45:2, 6-8; Lk. 4:22; Heb. 1:8-9)
    - b. description of the bride (45:9, 13-15; Rev. 19:7-9)
  - Destruction of the heathen (2:1-9; Acts 4:25-26; Rev. 6:12-17)
  - Millennial reign (45:6; 72:17; 98:4-9; Heb. 1:8; Rev. 11:15)
5. **Shepherd and His flock Psalms:**
- The Good Shepherd (22) describes the sacrifice of Christ—his past work (Jn. 10:11)
  - The Great Shepherd (23) describes the sufficiency of Christ—his present work (Heb. 13:20-21)
  - The Chief Shepherd (24) describes the sovereignty of Christ—his future work (1 Pet. 5:4)
6. **Divine conversational Psalms:**  
Five conversations between God the Father and God the Son are recorded in these five psalms relating to:
- His role at Creation (102:25-27; Heb. 1:10-12)—words of the Father to the Son
  - His earthly obedience (40:6-8; Heb. 10:5-9)—words of the Son to the Father
  - His anointing (45:6-7; Heb. 1:8-9)—words of the Father to the Son
  - His eternal priesthood (110:1, 4; Heb. 7:17, 21)—words of the Father to the Son
  - His victory at Armageddon (2:6-9; Rev. 2:27)—words of the Father and Son to each other
7. **Events in Israel's history Psalms:**
- Departure from Egypt and arrival in Canaan (114; Exod. 12-14; Josh. 1-3)
  - Sin at Kadesh-barnea (90; Num. 13-14)
  - Marriage of King Solomon (45; 1 Kings 3:1)
  - Death angel deliverance of Jerusalem (48, 67, 121; 2 Kings 19; Isa. 37)
  - Destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar (74, 79, 80; 2 Kings 25; 2 Chron. 36)
  - Babylonian captivity (137; 2 Kings 25; 2 Chron. 36)
  - Return from Babylonian captivity:
    - a. Praise by the returning remnant (126; Ezra 1-2)
    - b. Prayer by the returning remnant (85; Ezra 3-5)
  - Dedication of the second Temple (92; Ezra 6)
8. **Events in the life of David Psalms:**  
Living in Saul's court (11; 1 Sam. 18)  
Saved from Saul by Michal (59; 1 Sam. 19:11-18)  
Fleeing from Saul (63, 143; 1 Sam. 19-31)  
Escape from Achish (34, 56; 1 Sam. 21)  
Slaughter of priests at Nob (52; 1 Sam. 22:17-23)  
Living in cave of Adullam (57, 142; 1 Sam. 22)  
Betrayal by Ziphites (54; 1 Sam 23)

End of Saul's efforts to kill him (18; 1 Sam. 26-31; see 2 Sam. 22)

Return of Ark to Jerusalem (15, 24, 68, 132; 2 Sam. 6)

Joab's victory over Edomites (60; 2 Sam. 8)

Establishment of David's kingdom (21; 2 Sam. 8)

Sin with Bathsheba (32, 51; 2 Sam. 11-12)

Flight from Absalom (3, 4, 35, 41; 2 Sam. 15-18)

Cursed by Shimei ("Cush") (7; 2 Sam. 16:5-14)

Dedication of building materials for Temple (30; 1 Chron. 29)

Coronation of Solomon (72; 1 Chron. 29:21-25)

9. **Imprecatory Psalms:**

Many psalms, such as 7, 35, 55, and 109, are "imprecatory," calling on God to punish the wicked. While the violent language of these psalms may sometimes seem out of keeping with a God of grace and love, the following should be kept in mind:

- The hatred expressed reflected concern over violation of God's laws, not personal grievances
- The psalmists were right in expressing these things to God in prayer rather than seeking their own vengeance (see Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:19)
- The psalmists were motivated as much by concern for the victims of sin as by hatred for the sinners themselves (see 10:8-10)
- Though the psalmists prayed against their enemies, they prayed for them as well (see 9:20; 35:11-14)
- Even New Testament writers, with their more complete knowledge of grace, pronounced curses on people under certain circumstances (see Gal. 1:8-9; 2 Pet. 2:12)

10. **Future events Psalms:**

- Tribulation (46; Mt. 24; Rev. 6-19)
- Millennium (47, 98; Rev. 20)

11. **Most well-known Psalms:**

- The most beloved Old Testament chapter, 23
- The two greatest praise chapters, 103-104
- The greatest chapter on God's omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience, 139
- The three most extended summaries of Israel's history, 78, 105, 106
- The longest biblical chapter, 119
- The shortest biblical chapter, 117
- The most personal prayer of confession in the Bible, 51

## **COMPARISON WITH OTHER BIBLE BOOKS**

### **First & Second Samuel:**

- Both recount key events in the life of David

### **Isaiah:**

- Both speak of Christ's suffering on the cross (22:6-18; 69:20-21; Isa. 52:13-53:12)



- Both speak of the restoration of God's people through the Messiah (14:7; 53:6; Isa. 49:6)
- Both speak of Christ's judging the nations (2:8-9; 72; 96:13; 110:6; Isa. 2:4; 11:4; 41:1, 4).
- Both speak of Christ's eternal reign (18:50; 45:6; 102:26; Isa. 51:6-8; 60:20)

### **The Pentateuch:**

See #2 under Unique Features

### **TITLES FOR AND TYPES OF JESUS**

1. The Anointed King (2:2, 6)
2. The Son of the Lord (2:7)
3. The Believer's Rock and Fortress, Deliverer, Strength, and Shield (18:2)
4. The God of Jacob (20:1)
5. The Suffering Savior (22:1-18)
6. The Good Shepherd (23)
7. The King of Glory (24)
8. The Forgiving God (32, 51)
9. The Obedient Servant (40:6-8)
10. The Betrayed Friend (41:9; 55:12-14)
11. God of the Eternal Kingdom (45:6)
12. The Lord of Hosts (46:7)
13. The God of Jacob (46:7; 59:5)
14. The Lord Most High (47:2)
15. God of Abraham (47:9)
16. The Mighty God (50:1)
17. The Self-Sufficient God (50:10-12)
18. A Compassionate Judge (68:5)
19. The Almighty (68:14)
20. Holy One of Israel (71:22)
21. God of the Aged (71:9, 18) Yes!
22. The Eternal God (72:17)
23. The Most High (77:10)
24. The All Forgiving God (78:38, 39)
25. Shepherd of Israel (80:1)
26. Lord God of Hosts (80:4)
27. The Lover of Jerusalem (87:2)
28. The Eternal God (90:1-2)
29. The Coming Judge (98:13)
30. The God of the Cherubim (99:1)
31. The God of All Nature (104)
32. The God of the Exodus (106, 107)
33. The Priest after the Order of Melchizedek (110:4)
34. The Only True God (115:1-8)
35. The Rejected Cornerstone (118:22)

36. The God of the Word of God (119)
37. The Scourged Savior (129:3)
38. The Merciful God (137)
39. The Omniscient, Omnipresent, and Omnipotent God (139:1-18)
40. Healer of Broken Hearts, the One who Numbers and Names the Stars (147:3, 4)