

Through the Bible Book by Book

Old Testament

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Psalms

Theme: The book of Psalms is a collection of inspired Hebrew poetry, setting forth the worship and describing the spiritual experiences of the Jewish people.

It is the most personal portion of the Old Testament, giving us a revelation of the heart of the Jewish saint, and running over the whole scale of his experiences with GOD and man. In the historical books we see GOD speaking about man, describing his failures and successes; in the prophetic books we see GOD speaking to man, warning the wicked and comforting the righteous in the light of the future. But in Psalms we see man speaking to GOD, pouring forth his heart in prayer and praise; and speaking about GOD, describing and exalting Him for the manifestation of His glorious attributes.

As the Old Testament saint thus speaks to his GOD, whatever be his experience, whether of prosperity or adversity, blessing or chastisement, highest ecstasy or deepest despondency, there predominates one note all through his worship - that of praise.

He is able to praise GOD in all circumstances, for His faithfulness in the past is a guarantee of His faithfulness in the future. Also it is this comparison of the past and the future that has been the occasion for the introducing of the prophetic element into the Psalms. For as the scribe or prophet saw the failure of Israel's earthly kingdom and king, he broke forth into inspired utterance concerning the coming of GOD's glorious kingdom, and of His glorious King - the Messiah.

We may thus sum up the theme of the Psalms: GOD is to be praised in every circumstance of life; and this because of His faithfulness in the past, which is a guarantee of His faithfulness in the future.

Authors: Many of the Psalms are anonymous and the authorship of some are doubtful. The following are the generally recognized authors:

David. He is considered the author of the 71 psalms that bear his name.

Asaph, the conductor of the choral service of the temple in the time of David, and also a seer (I Chronicles 6:39; II Chronicles 29:30).

Solomon, king of Israel.

Moses, Israel's leader and lawgiver.

Ethan, a singer (I Chronicles 15:19).

Heman, a singer and the king's seer (I Chronicles 6:33; 15:19; 25:5, 6).

Ezra. A scribe, who taught the law to the Jews after the captivity.

Hezekiah, king of Judah.

The sons of Korah, leaders in Israel's worship.

Jeduthun, a director of music in the tabernacle (I Chronicles 16:41, 42).

CONTENTS:

In the Hebrew Bible the Psalms are divided into five books, as follows:

- Book I. begins with Psalm 1. [Genesis portion]
- Book II. begins with Psalm 42. [Exodus portion]
- Book III. begins with Psalm 73. [Leviticus portion]
- Book IV. begins with Psalm 90. [Numbers portion]
- Book V. begins with Psalm 107. [Deuteronomy portion]

The following classification of the Psalms has been suggested. (Read the Psalms mentioned in this classification. Remember the six main points of the classification.)

1. Psalms of instruction: On the character of good and bad men, their happiness and misery (Psalm 1); on the excellency of the divine law (19, 119); on the vanity of human life (90); duty of rulers (82); humility (131).
2. Psalms of praise and adoration: Acknowledgment of GOD's goodness and care (23, 103); acknowledgment of His power and glory (8, 24, 136, 148).
3. Psalms of thanksgiving: For mercies to individuals, (18, 34); for mercies to the Israelites generally (81,85).
4. Devotional psalms: the seven penitential psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143); expressive of trust under affliction (3, 27); expression of extreme dejection, though not without hope (13, 77):
 - prayers in time of severe distress (4, 28, 120);
 - prayers when deprived of public worship (42);
 - prayers in time of affliction and persecution (44);

- prayers of intercession (20, 67).

5. Messianic psalms: 2, 16, 22, 40, 45, 72, 110, 118.

6. Historical psalms: 78, 105, 106.

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