

## BIBLE SYNTHESIS III (Bible Survey)

### Introduction to Psalms

The Poetical Books — *Job* to the *Song of Solomon* — are distinctively experimental<sup>1</sup> in character, with each book being taken up with some phase of experimental holiness. In *Job*, we have holiness through suffering. In the *Psalms*, the devotional religious life. In *Proverbs*, obedience to God in daily life. In *Ecclesiastes*, the vanity of worldliness. In the *Song of Solomon*, the union and communion with the Bridegroom.”

—*All the Books and Chapters of the Bible*, Herbert Lockyer, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Page 120.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the great British Baptist Preacher, spent twenty of the best years of his life writing his commentary on the Psalms, *The Treasury of David*. Upon its completion, he wrote the following testimony: “A tinge of sadness is on my spirit as I quit ‘The Treasury of David,’ never to find on this earth a richer storehouse, though the whole palace of Revelation is open to me. Blessed have been the days spent in meditating, mourning, hoping, believing, and exulting with David. Can I hope to spend hours more joyous on this side of the golden gate? The book of Psalms instructs us in the use of wings as well as words: it sets us both mounting and singing.”

### WHAT IT IS

The book of Psalms is a collection of 150 spiritual songs or poems, most of which were set to music for the Temple worship. “They set forth the attitude of the soul in the presence of God when contemplating past history, present experience, and prophetic hope.” “Every Psalm is a direct expression of the soul’s consciousness of God.”

—Adapted from *The Outlined Bible*, Robert Lee, London

The Psalms is the Hymn Book of Israel which has also become the same for the Christian. The 150 Psalms were set to music for worship. Worship is the central idea. The Psalms magnify and exalt the LORD, His Person, His Name, His Word, and His goodness. Few will dispute that the Psalms is the best loved book in the entire Old Testament. There are treasures to be found here that are beyond compare. The Psalms are full of Christ. No other place in Scripture describes His suffering on the cross as completely as Psalm 22. He is the Shepherd in Psalm 23, and the King of Glory in Psalm 24. We have His authority for looking for Him in the Psalms (Luke 24:44).

The importance of the Psalms is emphasized by the number of times they are quoted in the New Testament. They are quoted perhaps more than any other portion of the Old Testament. Christ quoted them often. They are mentioned again as being fulfilled in His life, His death and His resurrection. They are quoted in the Acts and through the Epistles. Truly, this great book which is located right in the center of our Bible occupies a central place in the teachings of all of the Scriptures, and it commands an important place in our life.

### 1. Name of the Book:

(1) Psalms is taken from the Greek *Psalmoi* used in the Septuagint. *Psalmos* (Greek)

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<sup>1</sup> This means, “based on or derived from experience.”

primarily denoted a striking or twitching with the fingers (on musical strings); then, a sacred song, sung to musical accompaniment, a psalm.

—*An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, W. E. Vine

- (2) The Hebrew title is “Book of Praises” (*Sepher Tehillim*)

The Psalter was the hymnal of the Jewish people, and it is the praise and prayer manual of the Christian.

## 2. Author:

Many writers contributed one or more psalms:

- (1) David, “the sweet psalmist of Israel” (II Samuel 23:1) has 73 psalms assigned to him in the superscriptions at the head of the Psalms [Also, in Acts 4:25, Psalm 2 is attributed to him, and Psalm 95:7 is given to him in Hebrews 4:7 —see Ps. 95:7). He may well have been the author of some of the anonymous Psalms. The Psalms entitled “for the sons of Korah” (10 are so listed), and “for Solomon” also might have been written by David.
- (2) Moses wrote one Psalm (Psalm 90).
- (3) Some believe that the Korahites wrote twelve Psalms (Psalms 42—49, 84, 85, 87, 88). Since Psalms 42 and 43 belong together because of their unity of thought, and 43 brings the unresolved issues of Psalm 42 to a conclusion, even though Psalm 43 has no title, it is considered to be of the sons of Korah.
- (4) Asaph wrote twelve Psalms (Psalms 50, 73—83). See I Chronicles 15:17, 19; 25:1; II Chronicles 29:30, “Asaph, the seer.”
- (5) Heman, the Ezrahite is writer of Psalm 88.
- (6) Ethan, the Ezrahite wrote Psalm 89.
- (7) According to some, Solomon is *possibly* credited with two Psalms (Psalms 72 and 127). Though the superscription over Psalm 72 says, “for Solomon,” Ryrie and others tell this that this should be “of Solomon.” But see the statement in 72:20. This would be further evidence also that it is a Psalm of David. The Hebrew is *L’Solomon*—for Solomon. The superscription before Psalm 127 also says, “for Solomon.” Although there is a little more evidence that Solomon wrote this, that evidence is not at all conclusive.
- (8) All of the remaining Psalms are anonymous. The number of these varies from 39 to 50.

Although there may be some disagreement concerning the authorship of some, we do know who the Divine Author was, and when we get to heaven we will know who the human authors were.

## 3. Date:

- (1) Dates of Writing: Extending from Moses (Psalm 90), about 1,447 B.C. through the Babylonian captivity (see Psalm 137, for example), which extended from 605 to 535 B.C.

- (2) Dates of Compilation: Not many facts are known about this. It is supposed that the first group (Psalms 1 — 41), mostly written by David, was collected by Solomon. The second group (Psalms 42 — 72) was collected by the Levites who descended from Korah, this too is supposition. The third group (Psalms 73 — 89) was collected by Hezekiah. And groups four (Psalms 90 — 106) and five (Psalms 107 — 150) were collected by Ezra and Nehemiah. If these suppositions are so, this compilation and arrangement took 500 years to complete. That would cover a period from between 971 and 931 B.C. to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, about 450 B.C.

#### 4. Features of Psalms:

- (1) There are 150 Psalms in the Hebrew Bible. The LXX (Septuagint) has 151, with an extra Psalm, which it lists as being extra. We may conclude that the total number of 150 which we find in our English Bible is correct<sup>2</sup>.
- (2) “The titles of many of the Psalms are regarded by many expositors as of equal authority with the text itself, and hence if we can ascertain what the title really is we may venture to build conclusions upon it.”

—*Synthetic Bible Studies*, James M. Gray, Revell

- (3) All but 34 Psalms have titles. Many of them have roots deep in Hebrew History, and one good way of studying them is to know the circumstances which brought them to pass. See the table below as a guide to this understanding:

Psalm 3	—	II Samuel 15 — 18 (Absalom’s rebellion)
Psalm 30	—	II Samuel 5:11–12 or II Sam. 24; I Chron. 21)
Psalm 34	—	I Samuel 21:10 — 22:1
Psalm 51	—	II Samuel 11 — 12, especially 12:13
Psalm 52	—	I Samuel 21:1 — 22:19
Psalm 54	—	I Samuel 23:19; 26:1 (The treachery of the Ziphites)
Psalm 56	—	I Samuel 21:10–15; 27:4; 29:2–11
Psalm 57	—	I Samuel 22 (In the cave of Adullam)
Psalm 59	—	I Samuel 19:11–17
Psalm 60	—	II Samuel 8:13–14; I Chronicles 18
Psalm 63	—	I Samuel 22:5; 23:14–16
Psalm 142	—	I Samuel 22:1 or 24:3

— Adapted from *Exploring the Scriptures*, Phillips, Moody Press

- (4) The Division of the Psalms:

- 1. It is certain that the Psalms are not arranged chronologically. If they were, Psalm 90 (by Moses) would be first.
- 2. There is a division into 5 sections.

<sup>2</sup> The Septuagint was a translation from the Hebrew into the Greek which was made in Alexandria in Egypt between about 280 B.C. and 180 B.C. Although it is important in many ways, it contains many mistakes and inaccuracies. The object of the translators was not to make a scholarly and accurate translation. Alexandria later became known as a hotbed of allegorism, no doubt this trend also affected the LXX.

- 3. A very ancient Jewish statement: “Moses gave to the Israelites the five books of the *Torah* (Law) and to correspond with them David gave them the *Sefer Tehillim* (the Psalms), in which also are five books.” Others called the Psalms “the Pentateuch of David.”

## 6. Key Terms:

Hallelujah (occurs 13 times in 6 verses in Psalm 50)  
Worship is the *key idea*.

## 7. Key Verses:

Psalm 29:2  
(Key Psalm — Psalm 50)

## 8. Practical Value of the Psalms:

The Book of Psalms is one of the most useful books in the whole Bible, because it is so well suited to fulfill the needs of the human heart. It is especially precious to the child of God who will spend the necessary time meditating on the Psalms. There is no experience in the human life that does not find a parallel somewhere in one of the 150 Psalms. The Book of Psalms has been called the *Music* room in the “Temple of Truth,” the Bible. Every chord in the song of life is seen somewhere in Psalms, from the minor chord of Psalm 51, to the joyful notes of the Psalms of praise.

- (1) In the Psalms we have *man speaking to God*. In every other book of the Bible we have *God speaking to man*. And we see man speaking to God under almost every kind of circumstance. Thus, the Psalms give us models of devotion. In all the varied experiences of David’s life, and in all of his various circumstances, David prayed; he poured forth his heart, his thoughts, and his feelings to the LORD. These psalms show us what kind of heart attitude is acceptable to God in every circumstance.
- (2) It teaches truth in terms of human experience. There is much difference between learning a truth mentally, as a *proposition* (head knowledge), and learning it *experimentally* (heart knowledge). In fact, we can never *really* know God if all that we know is what we read. David *saw* his own sinfulness and realized God’s abhorrence of it, and through that experience he learned the fact of the holiness of God. Also through the same experience he learned the mercy and grace of God. He *saw* the salvation of God. He *saw* the answers to his prayers. The blessedness of the Christian experience comes from *experiencing* the truth of the doctrines that we *know*.
- (3) No other Old or New Testament book reveals Christ quite like the Psalms does. In the Gospels we read what He said and did, as well as what was done to Him. We see the *outer* life of the Saviour in the Gospels. But in the Psalms we may see His *inner* life, how He felt and how He lived in relation to His Father.  
We see the Psalms as a prophetic book, presenting Christ in His life, His death, His resurrection, His exaltation, and His coming Kingdom. In Luke 24:44 we see that the Psalms do speak of Christ. Matthew 27:35 shows that Psalm 22 is a prophecy of Christ. In the Gospels we may read of His crucifixion and all that

went on about Him during it, but in Psalm 22 we have revealed what was going through His *mind* and *heart* as He hung there upon that cruel cross. It has been said that the 22nd. Psalm is the very Holy of Holies of all Scripture.

- (4) The Psalms teach us praise. To say, “Praise the Lord” is not praising. It is only telling someone to praise Him. The Psalms teach us how to praise Him in a most wonderful and moving way. Great examples of this are found in Psalms 103 and 104.

## 9. Some of the Subjects of the Psalms:

There are five *outstanding* themes: The *Person* of God, The *Son* of God, the *Word* of God, the *Works* of God, and the *People* of God.

Subjects:

- (1) “*Maschil*” = instruction. These are Psalms of instruction, like Psalms 32, 44, 52, 78.
- (2) Psalms of history, like Psalms 105, 106 which cover the history of the nation. This is “Hebrew history set to music.”
- (3) Some are Psalms of adoration which are wholly occupied with God—His greatness, His mercy, His love, His power. See Psalms 8, 29.
- (4) There are Psalms of confession of which Psalm 51 is an example. Confession of David’s sin occupies the greater part of the Psalm.
- (5) Psalms of thanksgiving —like Psalm 18
- (6) Psalms of supplication —like Psalm 86
- (7) Messianic (prophetic) Psalms —Psalm 2, 16, 22, 24 and more
- (8) There are seven penitential Psalms —Psalm 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143
- (9) Then there are imprecatory Psalms —Psalms 109, 140 are examples. A lot of people are perplexed by these, since we have been taught to turn the other cheek. In the imprecatory Psalms, the Psalmist prays God’s judgment upon his enemies. These will be discussed, along with some of the others, as we go through the overview.

“*O come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the Rock of our salvation.*” — *Psalm 95:1* – This is the book of worship and praise. When we enter the Psalms we enter the “temple of praise.” We enter to rest, rejoice, and pray.

## Suggestions for Reading the Psalms

1. Read the Psalms in their historical setting when it can be determined. All great hymns come out of profound experiences. Their spirit thus embodies the kind of experience from which they come. The titles given at the head of many of the Psalms place them as to their historical background. These titles can be trusted and should be considered when studying the Psalm.

We often hear of some new Christian who immediately sets out to be a song writer. There are few if any “professional” song writers in God’s work. Some believers have written many songs, but they have also experienced many things.

2. Remember the character of the Psalms as you read them. They are meditations, prayers, praises, laments, imprecations, prophecies, etc. which are uttered by various persons under many kinds of circumstances.

Remember, being in poetic form, the writers have made use of allegory, simile, personification, metaphor, etc.

3. There is a law of interpretation called *The Law of Double Reference*. That is, a passage may refer to the circumstances in which the writer found himself, but it may point to another, future circumstance. A Psalm may refer *primarily* to David and the circumstances in which he found himself, but in its ultimate and full message it may refer to Christ, or to a specific future time in Israel’s history. An example of this is seen in Psalm 8:4–9 and Heb. 2:5–11.

4. Read them devotionally and practically. Meditate upon the truths and feelings expressed and ask God to teach your heart, then make every effort to obey that which the Holy Spirit teaches.

5. We should increase our knowledge of the Psalms so that we may “sing” these sacred songs “with the spirit and with the understanding.” (I Cor. 14:15) Though we may not have the ancient tune, or as far as that goes, any tune at all, we may “sing” them with the heart.

**BIBLE SYNTHESIS III**  
(Bible Survey)

**Outline of Psalms**

The outline of Psalms corresponds to the Pentateuch of Moses, it can be divided into five smaller books. *The Midrash on the Psalms*, an ancient Jewish commentary, tells us of the fact of this fivefold division. More evidence of such a plan is seen in the presence of a doxology at the end of each of the five books: Psalms 41, 72, 89, 106, and 150 include doxologies for each of their respective books. And indeed, Psalm 150 is an overall doxology to the entire book. While Psalm 1 is a general introduction to the Psalter, Psalms 2, 42, 73, 90, and 107 serve as introductions to their respective books.”

**OUTLINE**

(Adapted from notes by Robert Lee, London)

**1. Book 1 — Psalms 1 — 41 Corresponding with Genesis**

- Key thoughts: Psalm 8:4; 10:18

Man is in view: His state of blessedness, fall and recovery. The failure of man met by the salvation of God. Of the 41 Psalms in this section, 37 are prayers of David.

The two names, LORD (Jehovah) and God (Elohim) found in this section, just as in Genesis. Jehovah is used 272 times to 15 times for Elohim. Genesis contains the whole Bible in embryo. Just so it is with Psalms 1 – 41.

- (1) Man in a state of blessedness —Psalm 1
- (2) Man fallen from his position of blessing, now at enmity with God  
—Psalms 2 — 8
- (3) That enmity culminating in Antichrist (typical interpretation)  
—Psalms 9 — 15
- (4) Man finally blessed by the gracious work of the “Man Christ Jesus”  
—Psalms 16 – 41

**2. Book 2 — Psalms 42 — 72 Corresponding with Exodus**

Redemption is in view: Redemption through the blood. Israel’s Ruin (42–49), the Redeemer (50–60), Redemption (61–72). Or, we may say that Israel is specifically in view. In this group, 19 Psalms are of David. As Israel suffered and was redeemed, so the godly suffer and are delivered.

Exodus describes how God’s people suffered, were redeemed, made into a nation, and led forth toward the land of promise. As to the name of God: Jehovah is used 164 times to 30 times for Elohim.

- (1) Israel’s Ruin —Psalms 42 — 49  
“A cry” from the depths of oppression —Psalms 42 — 44. Psalms 45 — 48: He becomes their King and their refuge, He subdues the nations, and chooses their inheritance for them in Zion, His dwelling place.
- (2) Israel’s Redeemer —Psalms 50 — 60  
Psalm 51, the chief of the Psalms of penitence. David did not dodge

the issue, he said, *I have sinned against the LORD*. See II Samuel 12:13.

- (3) Israel's Redemption —Psalms 61 — 72  
Psalm 72:8 "*He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.*"

### **3. Book 3 — Psalms 73 — 89 Corresponds with Leviticus**

- Subject: The Sanctuary. Tabernacle, Temple, House, Assembly and Congregation appear in almost every Psalm in this section. It speaks of *Access to God*. The sanctuary is seen from its ruin to its restoration in the fullness of blessing. Leviticus has as its theme *holiness unto the LORD*. He is the Judge, the Victor, and the "Shepherd of Israel," though they have sinned so grievously. There is more.

See Psalm 84:1 "*How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts!*"

### **4. Book 4 — Psalms 90 — 106 Corresponds with Numbers**

- Subject: The Earth. Qualifications for service.

- (1) Blessing for the earth is needed — Psalms 90 — 94

Psalm 90 was written by Moses during the wilderness wanderings when he witnessed that generation dying off because of their unbelief. Numbers is the book of the wilderness, or earth, so the earth is central in this fourth section.

Had men organized the Psalms, the 90th Psalm would be first.

Read the opening verses of Psalms 90 and 91 together. When the devil attacked the Lord he quoted from Psalm 91:11–12. But Christ was victorious because He lived "in the secret place of the Most High" (91:1).

- (2) Blessing for the earth is anticipated — Psalms 95 — 100

- (3) Blessing for the earth is enjoyed — Psalms 101 — 106

If you really want to praise the LORD for His greatness, goodness and mercy, quote Psalm 103. It lifts the soul to God.

### **5. Book 5 — Psalms 107 — 150 Corresponds with Deuteronomy**

- Subject: The Word of God. All of the teaching of this group of Psalms is centered around the Word of God. It begins with Psalm 107 —107:20 "*He sent His Word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.*" Psalm 107 recites God's merciful deliverance of His people, just as Deuteronomy rehearsed their history and predicted their future.

Psalm 119 is an acrostic, it refers to the Word of God in almost every verse. It is the longest "chapter" in the entire Bible.

See Psalm 138:2, "... for thou hast magnified thy Word above all thy Name."

Man's motive of obedience to God.