

## European Bible School - Fall 2024 session

# The Psalms: Navigating the Seasons of the Soul

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### SESSION TITLES

- 1.0 Overture: Getting Acquainted with Psalms
- 2.0 Story and Song: David, Jesus, and Us
- 3.0 Laments: Authentic Prayers
- 4.0 Life-songs: Lyrics for Every Season

### 1.0 OVERTURE: GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH PSALMS

- The book of Psalms contains many well-known and most-loved passages of Scripture.
- Psalms are... prayers, praises, songs.
- The Psalter has been designated "The Song Book of Israel."
- We get the word "psalm" from the Greek word *psalmos*, which means "song." Nuanced, it can mean "a stringed instrument" or "a song sung to stringed accompaniment." The related Hebrew root is "zmr" meaning "to pluck."

### Why study psalms?

1. The psalms talk about Jesus! He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the *Psalms*." (Luke 24:44-47)
2. Psalms were valued by the early church
  - "Be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs." (Eph 5:18b-19a)
  - "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." (Col 3:16)
  - "Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise." (Jam 5:13)

### 1.1 Authorship

Most psalms have titles or superscriptions.

- Data from psalm titles include: (1) author, (2) name of collection, (3) type of psalm, (4) musical notations, (5) liturgical notations and (6) brief indications of occasion for composition.
- We find least 7 authors from these headings.

## Psalm Authors and their Works

Authors	Number of psalms	Attribution according to titles
David	73	Psalms 3-9; 11-32; 34-41; 51-65; 68-70; 86; 101; 103; 108-110; 122; 124; 131; 133; 138-145
Asaph	12	Psalms 50; 73-83
Sons of Korah	11	Psalms 42; 44-49; 84-85; 87-88
Solomon	2	Psalms 72; 127
Moses	1	Psalm 90
Heman	1	Psalm 88 (shared)
Ethan	1	Psalm 89
No author notated	50	

- In the original Hebrew, the attribution of authorship is done using a simple preposition, which is one letter (lamed).

### 1.2 Organization of Psalms

- Psalms is five books (five collections) in one.
- This no doubt is “Jewish-style organization,” much like the Pentateuch.

Book/section	Number of psalms	Authorial attribution	Ending benediction
Book 1	41	David – 37, Unknown – 4	41:13
Book 2	31	David – 18, Korahites – 7, Asaph – 1, Solomon -1, Unknown – 4	72:19-20
Book 3	17	Asaph – 11, David -1, Korahites – 3, Heman – 1, Ethan -1	89:52
Book 4	17	Moses – 1, David – 2, Unknown – 14	106:48
Book 5	44	David – 15, Solomon – 1, Unknown – 28	150 (whole psalm)

### 1.3 Poetic Features

#### Parallelism

- Lines are composed of short sentences used in parallel. The short sentence is called a *colon* (plural *cola*) or *verset*.  
*"The heavens declare the glory of God;  
the skies proclaim the work of his hands." (Ps 19:1)*

- Kinds of parallelism (traditional understanding)

Synonymous (19:1-2; see also Psalm 2:4)

*The heavens are telling the glory of God;  
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.  
Day to day pours forth speech,  
and night to night declares knowledge.*

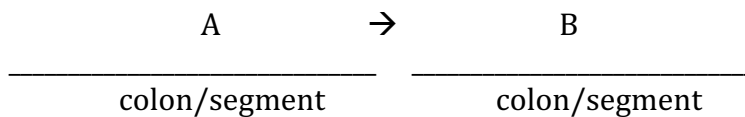
Antithetic (73:26, see also Psalm 1:6)

*My flesh and my heart may fail,  
**but** God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.*

Synthetic (2:6)

*I have installed my king on Zion  
my holy hill.*

- Movement in parallel segments (new understanding)



#### Meter and Rhyme

- Meter and rhythm in poetry have to do with patterns and recurrences in sound.
- This is best understood by considering the accents in the Hebrew, which may also be heard to some degree in translation.

#### Imagery and Figurative Language

- The psalmists invite the reader to see with the mind's eye, creating word pictures to convey emotions and convictions. Leland Ryken points out: "Poetry is above all a very special use of language... Poetry is the language of images."
- Some popular examples of the use of imagery are found in Psalms 1, 18, 19, 23, 90, and 104.
- Poetic passages contain a high percentage of figurative language (much more than in prose or narrative). By definition, a *figure of speech* occurs when a word or phrase is used in a sense other than the usual or literal sense.

Anthropomorphism: Giving human characteristics to God.

Psalm 130:2 O Lord, hear my voice. Let your *ears* be attentive to my cry.

Zoomorphism: Giving animal characteristics to non-animals.

Psalm 63:7 I sing in the shadow of Your *wings*.

Merism: Using two extremes or opposites to represent everything in between.

Psalm 139:2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up (=all his activity).

### 1.4 Types of Psalms

- Modern music is heard in a variety of genres. People listen to and combine different types.
- Major types: Purpose and form (see 1 Chronicles 16:1-4):

### Three Major Types of Psalms (based on 1 Chronicles 16:4)

Lament or Petition Psalms	NIV: to make petition	ESV: to invoke
Thanksgiving or Acknowledgement Psalms	NIV: to give thanks	ESV: to thank
Praise Psalms or Hymns	NIV: to praise	ESV: to praise

- Praise Songs or Hymns – composed for times when all is well; for those trouble-free times in life.
- Laments – composed for times of disorientation, when we are overwhelmed with anger, fear, or despair.
- Thanksgiving Psalms – composed for times of looking back at the past troublesome days, to express joy and gratitude to God for deliverance.

Most common are laments!

- In lament or complaint psalms we hear the strong, emotional words of individual sufferers or communities. These are words written by real people in difficult situations.
- Laments “give voice to the complaint saints feel when they experience various troubles in this life” (McGinniss).

The Minor Types

- Festival Songs and Liturgical Psalms - psalms which lay emphasis on public festivities or liturgical action; associated with special events such as the Sabbath or Dedication of the Temple
- Royal psalms – psalms which highlight royalty. This designation covers two types. In royal psalms for the current monarch, the subject matter is the *incumbent king*. Other royal psalms are called enthronement psalms.
- Wisdom psalms – psalms that teach. By their form and content these psalms share the characteristics of Old Testament wisdom literature (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes). They are also called didactic psalms (didactic=meant for instruction).
- Messianic psalm - a psalm which predicts or depicts the coming of the messiah in the person of Jesus Christ.
- Psalms of penitence (or prayer songs of the sinner) - psalms which reflect the sinfulness of man, typically articulating guilt and remorse.
- Acrostic poems - psalms so written that the initial letters of consecutive lines form an alphabet, word, or phrase (for easier memorization); just a sermon acrostic.

## 2.0 STORY AND SONG: DAVID, JESUS, AND US

### 2.1 David as Main Author

- The Psalter is associated with Israel’s monarchy and in particular, David.
- It is not surprising that David is considered the main author of Psalms. The historical books of the Bible speak of David's considerable accomplishments as a musician, singer and composer.
- One of David's Psalms is recorded in 2 Samuel 22. This Psalm reappears in the book of Psalms as Psalm 18 (with only slight variation).
- Here is a sampling of psalms connected with David’s life:

Chapter in the Psalter	Narrative in David’s Life	Description
(Psalm) 59	1 Samuel 19:8-18	Saul, in a fit of jealousy, tries to kill David. By a thread he escapes, through no less than Saul's daughter Michal.
56, 34	1 Samuel 21:10-15	David, fearing for his life, pretends to be a madman. The acting job seems to have worked, since Achish was convinced. David is spared and he praises God for it.
142	1 Samuel 22:1-3	After being cast out by Achish, David flees to Adullam. Hiding in a cave, he is downcast and overwhelmed.
52	1 Samuel 22:9-23	At Saul’s command, Doeg the Edomite commits mass murder. David is saddened over such wickedness.
63	1 Samuel 23:14, 24:2 or 2 Samuel 15:23-28	In 1 Samuel 23 and 24, David continues to flee from Saul. He hides in various “strongholds” in the desert. In 2 Samuel 15, Absalom’s following has grown, causing David to flee. The people of the countryside weep seeing their deposed king.
54	1 Samuel 23:19-29	The Ziphites went to Saul and told him that David was hiding amongst them. They told him exactly where they could locate David, but God delivered him out of the king’s hands.

### 2.2 Jesus in the Psalms

- The psalms carry a longing for something (*someone!*) greater who will fulfill all of Israel’s needs and dreams.
- In the OT, Jesus is the foreseen Messiah. The Hebrew word *mashiach*, from which we derive “messiah,” means “anointed one.”
- The psalm authors point to Jesus. They are mainly of two kinds: priests and kings. Asaph, Heman, and Korah were from priestly clans. David and Solomon were kings.
- This points to the two offices which are uniquely combined in Jesus, who is both priest and king (Hebrews 1:8-9; 5:6).

## Aspects of Jesus' Nature, Character, and Role

Psalm Passage	Detail of Jesus' Life	New Testament Reference
45:6	Deity and Kingship	Hebrews 1:8
2:7	The Son of God	Matthew 3:17
110:1	Rules over His enemies	Matthew 22:44
40:7-8	Delights in God's will	Hebrews 10:7
8:6	Ruler of all	Hebrews 2:8
69:9	Zealous for God's house	John 2:17
110:4	A priest forever	Hebrews 5:6
118:22	The chief stone of God's building	Matthew 21:42
118:26	Comes in the name of the Lord	Matthew 21:9

- The psalms look forward to the coming of the Messiah who would ultimately fulfill Yahweh's sovereign rule. To study this out further, I recommend a sequential study of these psalms: 2, 16, 22, 40, 45, 72, 110.
- Reflecting on these can easily translate to life application.

### 3.0 LAMENTS: AUTHENTIC PRAYERS

#### 3.1 Glimpses of Reality

- Laments/complaints—composed for times of disorientation, when we are overwhelmed with anger, fear, or despair.
- Our habit is to talk *about* God, not *to* him. We love discussing God. The Psalms resist these discussions. They are not provided to teach us about God but to train us in responding to him... The Psalms train us in a conversation of language, from talking about God to talking *to* God – Eugene Peterson

#### 3.2 Emotional Roadblocks

#### 3.3 Sampling from Laments

Why, O LORD, do you stand far off?  
Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? (Ps 10:1)

Strike all my enemies on the jaw;  
break the teeth of the wicked. (Ps 3:7)

Wake up, my God, and bring justice! (Ps 7:6b)

Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD, and abhor those who rise up against you? I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies. (139:21-22)

O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us -- he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks (137:8-9)

### 3.4 Reflection

- Rate yourself in your level of openness and honesty to God. (No pressure here; just be truthful!)

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5  
not honest          somewhat honest          very honest

- What are some decisions you can make toward building an authentic prayer life?

## 4.0 LIFE-SONGS: LYRICS FOR EVERY SEASON

### 4.1 Themes in Psalms

#### Happiness

- Happiness is a universal human pursuit.
- The psalms may be viewed as instruction (*torah* in Psalm 1) for *happiness*. The first word in Psalms (*ashrey*) occurs 28x in the book of Psalms.
- *Ashrey* has traditionally been translated “blessed” (KJV, NKJV, NIV, ESV). Others use the word “happy” (TNK, NRSV, NAB). But happiness in biblical usage carries much more than emotions.

#### Choices

- Psalms 1 and 2 introduce the concept of choices (contrasting decisions and contrasting destinies).
- Choices relate to wisdom. In the Bible, wisdom is really an approach to life.

#### Biblical Wisdom

- In Scripture, wisdom is concerned with everyday life, how to live well—what’s good for the body and soul. It refers to “life skills.”
- Such perspectives of wisdom are not unique to the ancient Israelites, although in Israelite wisdom commitment to God is simply assumed (cf. Prov 1:7). Note Psalms 1 and 2.

Psalm 1: Your choices determine your destiny.

Psalm 2: The better choice is to serve God.

You must make your choice!

### 4.2 Psalms for Expression

#### Psalms to Express Feelings and Needs

When overwhelmed with life’s challenges – Psalms 46, 54, 63

When under mental strain or fatigue – Psalms 41, 70

When thinking about the shortness of life – Psalm 90

When seeking brokenness for your sins – Psalms 32, 51

When experiencing affliction or needing comfort – Psalm 22

When needing encouragement – Psalms 27, 31

When disgraced or falsely accused – Psalms 3, 7, 62

When tempted – Psalms 15, 130

When needing confidence – Psalms 61, 91  
 When feeling envious of the wicked – Psalm 73  
 When you want to pray for others – Psalm 20  
 When you just want to draw close to God – Psalm 84  
 When you want to praise God for His mercies in adverse circumstances – Psalms 34, 40  
 When you acknowledge blessings – Psalms 46, 48, 66, 67  
 When you want to praise Him especially for His grace and mercy – Psalms 23, 103, 121, 145, 146

### 4.3 Practical Poetry

#### Psalm 73: “Mindchange”

- Wisdom psalms provide observations about wise choices.
- Psalm 73 may be classified as a wisdom psalm. It explores the struggle of the godly in what seems to be an unfair world.

#### Outline

Reaction (vv 1-15)  
 Realization (vv 16-22)  
 Affirmation (vv 22-28)

#### *BEFORE*

Self-focus  
 God not in the picture  
 Envy people  
 “Lucky them...  
 Poor me because I don’t have \_\_\_\_\_.  
 I wish I could be like them...

#### *AFTER*

Outward-focus  
 God in the center of the picture  
 Concern for people  
 “Lucky me...”  
 Poor them because they don’t have God.  
 I wish they could be like me!

#### Psalm 26: A Song for the Mistreated

- Though this is poetry, it is practical!
- We are privy to the struggles in David’s soul. He offers ways to deal with injustice or unfair treatment.

#### 1. Be open before God (vv1-2)

Note the Hebrew terms:

*bachan*=to examine/prove/scrutinize

*nasah*=try (v2) (see Deut 8:2 “God... is testing you, to know what was in your heart”

*tsaraff*=to smelt/refine/test

#### 2. Let his love inspire obedience (vv3-7)

Remember *your* story; how God has shown his love for you

Implied here are two very subtle yet common temptations when it comes to mistreatment:

To doubt God’s love

To drift into disobedience

#### 3. Refuse the temptation to get even (vv4-5)

4. Maintain a positive attitude (vv6-7)

Note the verbs “wash,” “go about,” “proclaim,” “declare”

Avoid falling into self-pity (e.g., Psalm 73:13-14, “Surely in vain I kept my heart pure”)

5. Be faithful in public worship (vv8,12)

Worship was a priority (Psalm 27:4, 65:4, 84:10).

Don't let Satan win other battles too!

6. Patiently stand and wait for relief (vv9-12)

Strong conclusion!

Some of the Hebrew terms used.

### **CONCLUSION**

- God has blessed us with a biblical prayer book and songbook, the book of Psalms.
- May we feel the Lord's power and presence as we take these songs with us, navigating with confidence the seasons of life!