

REF. MATERIAL

Notes on Psalms

¹The Hebrew name for the book of Psalms is **TEHILLIM**, meaning “*praises*,” although many of the psalms are rather elegiac (mournful).

Most of the psalms have the superscription (Hebrew: **MIZMOR**, meaning “*a poem song*”). But in the actual superscriptions of a psalm the word **TEHILLAH** is applied only to Psalm 145:1, which is David's psalm of praise.

In the Septuagint, the word **psalm** is rendered by **PSALMOS**, that is, “*a song sung to music*” or “*a lyric poem*.”

The Greek word **PSALTERION** means “*a stringed instrument*,” hence by a metaphor the book of Psalms is called the **Psalter**.

King David wrote the majority of the psalms [**2Sa.23:1**], and there are 73 psalms ascribed to David in their titles. Others were probably written by David and are verified by comparing with other Scriptures; for example, Psalm 2 is verified as to who wrote it in Acts 4:24-25.

Psalm 136 is generally called **The Great Hallel**. But the Talmud includes also Psalm 120-135.

Psalm 113-118, inclusive, constitute the **Hallel** that is recited at 3 great feasts, at the new moon, and on the 8 days of the Feast of Dedication.

NOTE

When speaking/writing about psalms from the book of Psalms take care to use the correct wording.

- If referring to several psalms, the wording is: “*Psalms 1 through 5*”;
- however, if speaking of individual psalms, the wording is: “*Psalm 5*” not “*Psalm 5*”.

¹ First 3 paragraphs pulled from *American Tract Society Dictionary* and *Smith's Bible Dictionary* March 2017.

BOOKS AND AUTHORSHIP OF THE PSALMS

The 150 psalms have been divided into 5 Books. Each book corresponds to the Pentateuch (Genesis-Deuteronomy). The old rabbis are known to have called Psalms the **Pentateuch of David**. Each book ends in a burst of praise or doxology.

Book	No. of Psalms	Description — Author ²	Praise/Doxology
1	41 psalms [Psa.1-41]	Genesis MAN — All David's except Psa.1, 2, 10, & 33 which, though anonymous, may be ascribed to him.	"Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting. Amen, and Amen." [Psa.41:13]
2	31 psalms [Psa.42-72]	Exodus ISRAEL — David (18 psalms), Solomon (Psa.72), rest anonymous (possibly Korah); believed to have been compiled in the reign of King Hezekiah.	"Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen." [Psa.72:18-19]
3	17 psalms [Psa.73-89]	Leviticus SANCTUARY — David (Psa.86), Heman the Ezrahite (Psa.88), Ethan the Ezrahite (Psa.89), rest anonymous; probably compiled in the reign of Josiah	"Blessed be the LORD for evermore. Amen, and Amen." [Psa.89:53]
4	17 psalms [Psa.90-106]	Numbers MOSES AND WILDERNESS — David (Psa.101 & 103), Moses (Psa.90), rest are anonymous.	"Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting: and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the LORD." [Psa.106:48]
5	44 psalms [Psa.107-150]	Deuteronomy LAW AND LAND — 17 ascribed to David, Solomon (Psa.127). Contains the "Songs of Degrees" (Psa.121-122)	"Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD." [Psa.150:6]

These classifications of the Psalms by authorship are designated by the superscriptions.

Author	Reference
King David	Psa.3-9, 11-32, 34-41, 51-65, 68-70, 86, 101, 103, 108-110, 122, 124, 131, 133, 138-145
Descendants of Korah	Psa.42, 44-49, 84-85, 87
Asaph	Psa.50, 73-83
Solomon	Psa.72, 127
Ethan	Psa.89
Heman	Psa.88

² Information pulled from *Easton's Bible Dictionary*, March 2017.

Author	Reference
Moses	Psa.90
Anonymous	All others (50): Psa.1-2, 10, 33, 43, 50, 66-67, 71, 91-100, 102, 104-107, 111-121, 123,125-126, 128-130, 132, 134-137, 146-150

STYLE OF POETRY

The style throughout the psalms is mainly that of lyric poetry with 3 characteristics: ÆThought Pattern, • Parallelism, and Ž Subjective Testimony.

- Thought Pattern:** Hebrew poetry does not depend on rhyme or meter, but is built around a thought.
- Parallelism:** Most of the psalms are built around this structure.
 - Synonymous:** The 2nd line repeats the **same** truth of the 1st line:
*“The EARTH is the LORD’S, and the fullness thereof;
the WORLD, and they that dwell therein.” [Psa.24:1]*
 - Antithetic:** The thought of the 1st line is emphasized by a **contrasting** thought in the 2nd line.
*“For the LORD knoweth the way of the RIGHTEOUS:
but the way of the UNGODLY shall perish.” [Psa.1:6]*
 - Synthetic:** The 2nd line **explains or adds** something to the 1st line.
*“The LAW of the LORD is perfect,
CONVERTING the soul.” [Psa.19:7a]*
- Subjective Testimony:** Whatever is written is the personal experience, thoughts, and emotions of the author.

TYPES OF SUBJECTS IN THE BOOK OF PSALMS

Didactic (instruction): Psa.1, 5, 7, 15, 17, 50, 73, 94, 101	Thanksgiving: Psa.16, 18
History (highlights of Israel’s history): Psa.78, 105-106, 136, (Acts. 7)	Messianic: Past: Psa.2, 18, 20-21, 45, 61, 72, 89, 110, 132 Present: Psa.22, 35, 41, 55, 69, 109 Future: Psa.16, 40 Psa. 23-24, 31, 50, 68, 96-98, 102, 118
Hallelujah: Psa.106, 111-113, 115-117, 135, 146-150	Nature: Psa.8, 19, 29, 33, 65, 104
Penitential (confession of sin): Psa.6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143	Pilgrim: Psa.120-134
Supplication: Psa.86	Imprecatory (cursing): Psa.35, 52, 58-59, 69, 83, 109, 137, 140