

The Book of Psalms

Study Notes

Introduction

The book of Psalms is the largest collection of poetry in the Bible. This fascinating book was crafted to be read from beginning to end, and it invites us to a literary temple where we can meet with God and hear the entire biblical storyline retold in poetic form. Use these study notes to explore the ideas from our video [How to Read the Bible: The Book of Psalms](#).

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Literary Design and Theological Themes of Psalms

The Psalms scroll has been woven into the three-part design of the TaNaK (an acronym for the three sections of the Hebrew Bible) by means of the literary seams in Deuteronomy 34:10-12, Joshua 1:1-9, Malachi 4:4-6, and Psalms 1-2. The compositional design of the Psalms is riddled with cross-references to the Torah and the Prophets. These references prepare us to find intentional literary design within the Psalms scroll as a whole.

The Psalms contain many older individual poems and songs and older collections of poems, but it is not designed to function like a hymnbook. It is meant to be read from beginning to end, and this can be discerned from the scroll's literary design.

Psalms 146-150 are a symmetrically shaped five-poem conclusion (hallelu-yah inclusios).

| | | | |
|---|-----------|-----------|---|
| A | Psalm 146 | | v. 1 <i>hallelu-Yah!</i> v. 10 <i>hallelu-Yah</i> |
| | Psalm 147 | | v. 1 <i>hallelu-Yah!</i> v. 20 <i>hallelu-Yah</i> |
| | B | Psalm 148 | v. 1 <i>hallelu-Yah</i> <i>hallelu Yahweh from the skies</i> <i>hallelu him in the heights</i> v. 2 <i>hallelu him all his angels</i> <i>hallelu him all his armies</i> v. 3 <i>hallelu him sun and moon</i> [10 hallelu = 10 words of Genesis 1] <i>hallelu him all stars of light</i> v. 4 <i>hallelu heavens of the heavens</i> <i>hallelu waters above the heavens</i> v. 5 <i>let them hallelu the name of Yahweh</i> <i>for he commanded, and they were created</i> |
| A | Psalm 149 | | v. 1 <i>hallelu-Yah!</i> v. 9 <i>hallelu-Yah</i> |
| | Psalm 150 | | v. 1 <i>hallelu-Yah!</i> v. 6 <i>hallelu-Yah</i> |

The five-part conclusion of Psalms 146-150 corresponds to the five-part shape of the entire scroll, which is indicated by four editorial conclusions that demarcate five units.

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| Introduction | Psalms 1-2 | |
| Book 1 | Psalms 3-41 | Psalm 41:13 <i>Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from forever to forever. Amen and amen.</i> |
| Book 2 | Psalms 42-72 | Psalm 72:18-19 <i>Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who alone works wonders. And blessed be his glorious name forever; and may the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen, and amen.</i> |
| Book 3 | Psalms 73-89 | Psalm 89:52 <i>Blessed be the Lord forever! Amen and amen.</i> |
| Book 4 | Psalms 90-106 | Psalm 106:48 <i>Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, From forever even to forever. And let all the people say, "Amen."</i> |
| Book 5 | Psalms 107-145 | |
| Conclusion | Psalms 146-150 | |

These five larger units, or books, are made up of many smaller pre-existing collections.

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Psalms of Ascents | Psalms 120-134, 135-136 |
| Hallel Psalms | Psalms 111-118 |
| Twin Psalms | Psalms 9-10, 42-43, 105-106, 112-113 |
| Psalms of Asaph | Psalms 50, 73-83 |
| Psalms of Korah | Psalms 42-49, 84-88 |
| Yahweh Reigns Psalms | Psalms 93-99 |
| Early David Collection | Psalms 3-41, 51-71, and concludes at Psalms 72:20 |

The final date of the collection in its current form postdates the psalms of the latest period. Many psalms presuppose Jerusalem's destruction and Babylonian exile (Ps. 74; Ps. 79; Ps. 106:1-6, 47; Ps. 137), as well as the later return of many Israelites to Judea (Ps. 85, 126) and the rebuilding of the temple in the late 500s B.C. This places the composition of the Psalter in the 400s B.C. or later.

Preliminary Conclusion About the Psalter

There has been a general agreement among recent scholars on the following points.

1. The Psalter is not a random collection of psalms; rather, it was designed to be one coherent book.
2. The Psalms were given a new interpretation in the post-exilic period.
3. The new understanding of the Psalter was intended to offer an alternative way of using the Psalms in the new circumstances of the post-exilic period.
4. The positioning of certain psalms is crucial for the study of the structure and theological meaning of the Psalter.
5. There is evidence that some pairs and small groups of psalms were formed by the redactors in order to further the new interpretation.
6. Groups of psalms already formed at an earlier time were retained by the final editors.
7. "The Psalms, most of which were expressions of prayer, came to be regarded as a source of instruction or an aid to theological reflection (God's word to humanity)." — Norman Whybray, *Reading the Psalms as a Book*, 30-31.

We do not regard the Psalter as some other commentators have, as nothing but a "storage cabinet" for individual psalms, but rather as a successively developed, but nevertheless compositionally structured entity whose form gives an additional dimension of meaning to each individual psalm.

Frank Lothar-Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51-100*, xi.

Although the arrangement of the Psalms, which seems to me to contain the secret of a mighty mystery, hath not yet been revealed on to me, yet, by the fact that they in all amount to 150, they suggest somewhat even to us, who have not as yet pierced with the eye of our mind the depth of their entire arrangement, where on we may without being over-bold, so far as God giveth, be able to speak.

St. Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* in Philip Schaff (ed.) *Saint Augustin: A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (1888), 681.

If Psalms 146 through 150 are the conclusion to the scroll, and if Psalms has an internal organization of five parts, we should look to the beginning of the book for an introduction. In Book 1 (Ps. 1-41) all the poems have the superscription "Of David," except Psalms 1 and 2. (Ps. 10 is unique because Ps. 9 and 10 used to be a single poem and are still one in the Old Greek Psalter.)

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| <p>Psalm 1</p> <p><i>¹How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers!</i></p> <p><i>²But his delight is in the Torah of Yahweh, and in his Torah he whispers day and night.</i></p> <p><i>³He will be like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers.</i></p> <p><i>⁴The wicked are not so, for they are like chaff which the wind drives away.</i></p> <p><i>⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.</i></p> <p><i>⁶For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.</i></p> | <p>Psalm 2</p> <p><i>¹Why are the nations in an uproar And the peoples whispering a vain thing?</i></p> <p><i>²The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against Yahweh and against his Messiah, ³Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!"</i></p> <p><i>⁴He who sits in the heavens laughs, Yahweh scoffs at them.</i></p> <p><i>⁵Then he will speak to them in his anger and terrify them in his fury, saying,</i></p> <p><i>⁶"But as for me, I have installed my king upon Zion, my holy mountain."</i></p> <p><i>⁷"I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: he said to me, 'You are my son, today I have begotten you. ⁸Ask of me, and I will give the nations as your inheritance, and the ends of the earth as your possession.</i></p> <p><i>⁹You shall break them with a rod of iron, you shall shatter them like earthenware."</i></p> <p><i>¹⁰Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; take warning, O judges of the earth.</i></p> <p><i>¹¹Worship the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling.</i></p> <p><i>¹²Kiss the son, lest he become angry, and you perish in the way, For his wrath may soon be kindled.</i></p> <p><i>How blessed are all who take refuge in him!"</i></p> |
| <p>Two types of people are identified by their relationship to Yahweh's Torah. Their wellbeing or their calamity depends on their obedient response.</p> | <p>Two types of people are identified by their relationship to Yahweh's Messiah. Their wellbeing or their calamity depends on their obedient response.</p> |
| <p>In Psalm 1:1-2, the one who meditates on Torah is blessed (אשרי).</p> | <p>Psalm 2:12 says those who take refuge in the Messiah are blessed (אשרי) [inclusio].</p> |
| <p>In Psalm 1:2, the righteous "meditate" (הג'ה) on the Torah.</p> | <p>In Psalm 2:1, the wicked nations "plot" (הג'ה) against the Messiah.</p> |
| <p>In Psalm 1:6, the wicked who ignore the Torah perish (אב'ד + דרך) "in their way."</p> | <p>In Psalm 2:12, the wicked who rebel against the Messiah are destroyed (אב'ד + דרך) "in their way."</p> |

Psalms 1 and 2 are united by unique vocabulary and themes. Psalm 1 and 2 function as the introduction to the entire Psalms scroll, and they focus on the key themes of the Torah, Messiah, and the temple.

In Psalm 1, the righteous are those who immerse themselves in the Torah, and in so doing, they enter God's temple presence and experience the life of new creation.

In Psalm 2, God has appointed his Messiah as the new temple builder who will bring justice to all nations in his universal Kingdom.

Who is the righteous, blessed one of Psalm 1? [see hyperlinks chart below]

Psalm 1 describes the ideal human using the language of Israel's ideal king (Deut. 17). But none of Israel's kings ever lived up to this ideal, not even David. So the ideal figure is portrayed as a new Joshua (Josh. 1), and this figure is the new human planted in the new Eden temple (temple-river texts). The reader of TaNaK knows this portrait well from the Torah and Prophets, but the book of Psalms makes its own contribution to the messianic mosaic in the TaNaK.

Psalm 2 describes the new Joshua as the messianic son of David who has been appointed to rule the chaotic nations and bring final justice. However, the nations are invited to seek refuge in the messianic king and discover God's blessing.

Psalms 3 through 41 are going to adopt the portrait of David from 1-2 Samuel as an image of the ideal David. He will be a persecuted, suffering king who seeks refuge and deliverance from God alone. This is how the Messiah will be exalted as the new human to rule the world (Ps. 8).

The introduction in Psalms 1-2 invites us to see the Psalms scroll as a poetic Torah.

The scroll recreates the experience of entering the temple for worship and hearing the Levitical choirs sing the praises of God (Asaph, Heman, sons of Korah). The Psalms scroll is a portable temple.

The scroll also invites us into David's life of lament and prayer. He becomes an example of the ideal servant of God who bears witness to God's Kingdom, suffers persecution from enemies, and waits upon God in prayer.

The scroll will offer a symphonic retelling of the interpretation of Israel's history offered in the Torah and Prophets.

The scroll invites God's servants to imitate the way of the future David and so seek refuge in him/Yahweh. When they do so, they can inhabit the future temple even while living outside the land among their enemies.

Hyperlinks in Psalm 1:2-3 to Joshua 1, Deuteronomy 17, and Eden texts in the Torah and Prophets

The Righteous One of Psalm 1:2-3

But his delight is in the Torah (תורה) of the LORD.
 And in his Torah **he meditates day and night** (הג"ה + יום) (ולילה).
 He will be like a tree planted by streams of water (פלגי מים),
 which **yields its fruit in its season**
and its leaf does not wither;
 and in whatever he does, he prospers (צלח).

A New Joshua

Josh. 1:7-8

Be careful to do according to all the Torah (תורה) which
 Moses my servant commanded (צו"ה) you; **do not turn from it to the right or to the left** (סו"ר מן + ימין ושמאל),
 so that you may have success wherever you go.
 This book of the Torah (תורה) shall not depart from your mouth,
 but you shall **meditate on it day and night** (הג"ה + יום ולילה)
 so that you may be careful to do (לעשות שמ"ר) according to all that is written in it;
 for then you will make your way prosperous (צלח).

The Tree of Life in a New Eden temple

Ezekiel 47:1, 9, 12
 There was water flowing from under the threshold of the temple ... everywhere the streams flow every living creature comes to life ... everything where the stream flows will have life ... and upon each side, this and that, will grow up every tree for eating, **its leaf will not wither, and its fruit will not finish** (םתי).
 Genesis 2:8-10
 The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there he placed the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Now a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it divided and became four rivers.
 Psalm 46:4
 There is a river whose streams (גלפ) make glad the city of God, the holy dwelling places of the Most High.
 Psalm 65:4, 9
 How blessed is the one whom you choose and bring near to dwell in your courts.
 We will be satisfied with the goodness of your house, your holy temple.
 You visit the earth and cause it to overflow; you greatly enrich it; the stream (גלפ) of God is full of water.
 Joel 3:18
 And in that day the mountain will drip with sweet wine, and the hills will flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah will flow with waters (מימ).
 And a spring (ויעת) will go out from the house of the LORD to water the valley of Shittim (acacia trees).

The Righteous King Anticipated by Moses

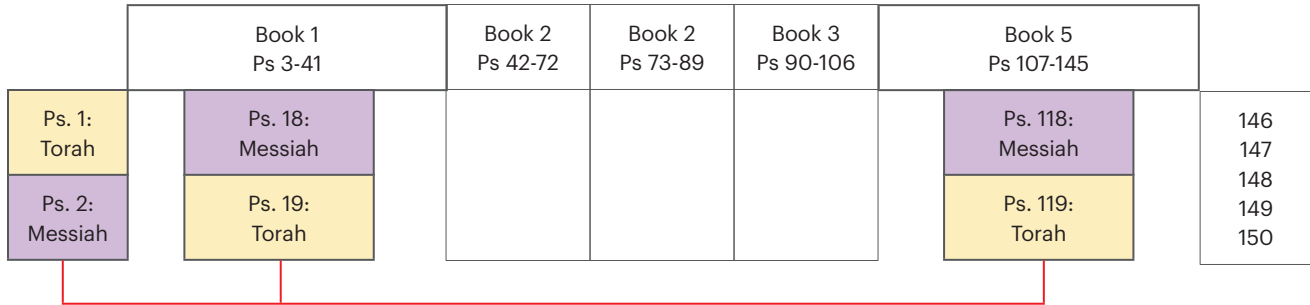
Deut. 17:15, 18-20

You shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses ... Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this Torah (תורה) on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests.
 It shall be with him and he shall read it **all the days of his life**, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by **carefully observing** (שמ"ר + לעשות) all the words of this Torah and these statutes ... that he may not **turn to the right or the left** (סו"ר מן + ימין ושמאל) from the commandment, so that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel.

Psalms 1 and 2

Psalms 1 and 2 establish a key compositional pattern that envelops the entire Psalms scroll.

1. There are many royal/king psalms found at strategic locations throughout the scroll (e.g. Psalms 2, 20, 21, 22, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 118, 132).
2. Three of these have been placed alongside the only three Torah psalms in the entire scroll (Psalms 1, 19, 119).



3. These three psalms have been coordinated by a whole matrix of verbal and thematic hyperlinks (Jamie Grant, *The King as Exemplar: The Function of Deuteronomy's Kingship Law in the Shaping of the Book of Psalms*).
4. Psalms 1-2 set up a narrative plot for the Psalms scroll.
 - a. Character: The righteous are embodied in the righteous king who immerses himself in the Torah to discover the source of eternal life.
 - b. Plot Conflict: The righteous king faces hostile opposition from the violent nations.
 - c. Plot Resolution: How will the righteous cope with such hostility and keep their hope in God's promise?

David in the Psalms

1. David was known as a musician and songwriter from a young age (see 1 Sam. 16:14-23, 2 Sam. 23:1-7), and his talents were remembered (see Am. 6:5). His poems were also remembered and sung by the Levitical choirs in the temple (see Ezra 12:45-46, 1 Chron. 25).

Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is a skillful musician, a mighty man of valor, a warrior, prudent in speech, and a handsome man; and the LORD is with him.

1 Samuel 16:18

Now these are the last words of David. David the son of Jesse declares, the man who was raised on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob and the sweet psalmist of Israel, declares, "The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me, and his word was on my tongue."

2 Samuel 23:1-2

For [the Levites] performed the worship of their God and the service of purification, together with the singers and the gatekeepers in accordance with the command of David and of his son Solomon. For in the days of David and Asaph, in ancient times, there were leaders of the singers, songs of praise and hymns of thanksgiving to God. So all Israel in the days of Zerubbabel and Nehemiah gave the portions due the singers and the gatekeepers.

Nehemiah 12:45-47

These are the men David put in charge of the music in the house of the LORD after the ark came to rest there. They ministered with music before the tabernacle, the tent of meeting, until Solomon built the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem. They performed their duties according to the regulations laid down for them.

1 Chronicles 6:31-32

Moreover, David and the commanders of the army set apart for the service some of the sons of Asaph and of Heman and of Jeduthun, who were to prophesy with lyres, harps and cymbals ... All these were under the direction of their father to sing in the house of the Lord, with cymbals, harps and lyres, for the service of the house of God. Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman were under the direction of the king.

1 Chronicles 25:1, 6

2. David is mentioned in the superscription of 73 psalms, 13 of which contain some kind of reference to a narrative about David in 1-2 Samuel (Ps. 3, 7, 18, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, 142).
3. The titles that mention people are not simply indicating historical authorship, but are (1) meant to recall their narrative portraits found within the Torah and Prophets, and they are (2) a part of the poetic narrative being told in the Psalms scroll itself.
 - a. For example, take "Of David," which in Hebrew means le-David/ לְדָוִד : "related to/with reference to David." This title functions similarly in relation to Solomon (Ps. 72), and Moses (Ps. 90) and means "related to the David, Solomon, and Moses in the text of the Torah and Prophets."
 - b. Many of these poems are connected to David, but the shaping of the Psalter in relation to the literary design of the TaNaK shows that the David of the psalm titles refers to both the David of the narratives of 1-2 Samuel and the messianic David of the prophets (Ezek. 34, 37, etc.).

4. The question is how they are related to David, Solomon, and Moses.

- a. It could simply indicate authorship, but this doesn't explain the fact that many psalms of David have been supplemented for their literary context in the book of Psalms.
 - i. Psalms 23:6 and 27:4 speak of a temple that didn't exist in David's time.
 - ii. Psalm 51:18-19 assumes a destroyed temple.
- b. The book of Psalms was explicitly shaped in the period after the exile. Psalms 106:47, 137 says "by the rivers of Babylon," and Psalm 147:2 says "the exiles of Israel."

5. The TaNaK depicts David and the Levites as prophets whose poems were prophecies (see 1 Chron. 25:1-2).

Of the sons of Asaph: Zaccur, Joseph, Nethaniah and Asharelah; the sons of Asaph were under the direction of Asaph, who prophesied under the direction of the king. Of Jeduthun, the sons of Jeduthun ... who prophesied in giving thanks and praising the LORD.

1 Chronicles 25:2-3

- a. Jesus and the apostles continued this tradition, reading the Psalms as "eschatological prophecy" pointing forward to the messianic age and the Kingdom of God (Mark 12:35-37, Acts 2:29-35, Ps. 110, Ps. 116).

Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. And so, because he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants on his throne, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh suffer decay.

Acts 2:29-31

- b. Hebrews 4:7 describes Psalm 95 as being written "in David" (Greek: εν Δαυιδ), which is not a reference to authorship but to the entire Psalms scroll itself as a scriptural witness "of David."
- c. Jesus adopted the suffering servant poems to express his own messianic passion in Jerusalem. He uses these poems in the garden of Gethsemane in Matthew 26:38, quoting Psalm 42:5-6, and on the cross in Matthew 27:46, quoting Psalms 22:1.
- d. In Romans 15:3-4, Paul quotes Psalms 69:9 as a reflection of the messianic mindset of Jesus.

6. The Psalms refer to the biblical David (along with the biblical Solomon/Moses depicted earlier in the TaNaK) as an archetype of the future king and prophet figure anticipated in Deuteronomy 34:10-12, Malachi 4:4-6, and in the Prophets. (See the David of Hosea 3:5; Jer. 30:9, 33:15; Ezek. 34:23, 37:24.)

- a. David's personal and family story in 1-2 Samuel is told as a miniature version of Israel's entire story in Genesis-2 Kings.

| Israel's Story in Genesis Through 2 Kings | David's Story in 1 and 2 Samuel |
|--|--|
| The younger son, chosen in contrast to the older brother: Abel/Seth → Shem → Abram → Isaac → Jacob → Judah | The younger son, chosen in contrast to older brothers: Eliab + six brothers → David |
| Protected in the wilderness | God is "with him" in the wilderness |
| God defeats a super bad guy to appoint his chosen son | God defeats Goliath to appoint David as Israel's deliverer |
| Victory over the Canaanites leads to the promised land | Victory over the Canaanites leads to Jerusalem/Zion |
| After a time of abundance/victory, there are many moments of idolatry and covenant violation | After a time of abundance/victory, there is one key moment of covenant violation (2 Sam. 12) |
| The sins of Israel's leaders/kings (David/Solomon) are imitated by their sons | David's sin is imitated by his sons (adultery, rape, and murder) (2 Sam. 13-14) |
| Leading to the capture of Jerusalem and exile | Leading to the capture of Jerusalem by Absalom, and David's exile from the city (2 Sam. 15-19) |
| The return from exile brings only a semi-return to the ideal, which is compromised | David's return from exile brings about a compromised rule, which is threatened |

The Psalms scroll is a poetic reflection on the David/Israel story from the promised land to exile storyline.

Cast as a suffering figure, David in the Psalms appears much like the "servant of the Lord" in Isaiah. David is one who knows humiliation and shame, "suffering and acquainted with pain" (Isa. 53:3). In the Psalter, kingship is transformed by its exclusive association with David, and in turn, by the characterization of David as God's servant who bears the shame of the people (as in Ps. 89). The king in the Psalms is not one in whom the people find refuge so much as he is one who seeks refuge in God and models a life of dependence on the Lord for the people ... The presence of such a "David" as an exemplary figure points to the future "David" who will bring in God's new kingdom (as in Ezek. 37:24-28, Deut. 17:14-20).

Adapted from Jerome Creach, *The Destiny of the Righteous in the Psalms*, 109.

In the Psalms of David, the "I" is understood in terms of the "we" whose voice pervades the Psalms as the book progresses. The theological identity of David is corporate, similar to the use of first-person songs to express the voice of all the people in Exodus 15 and Isaiah 12. This does not cancel the first-person style, or eliminate the reading and use of the poems by individuals. Rather, what happens is the correlation of corporate and individual identities. **David's narrative is taken as an illustration and instruction about Israel's life under God.** Through David and his first-person words in the psalms, individuals can now understand their own experience in the community of faith.

Adapted from James L. Mays, "Psalm 118 in the Light of Its Canonical Context."

Literary Design and Main Themes of Book 1: Psalms 3-41

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| Psalms 3-14 | The persecuted, suffering David of the past (see headings for Ps. 3-7) becomes a model of prayer and dependence upon God's promise for future generations (Ps. 9-10). |
| Psalms 15-24 | Only a righteous David can enter into God's temple forever (Ps. 15, 24), which can only be a David of the future (Ps. 18), who will be wholly faithful to the Torah (Ps. 19) and thus delivered from death itself (Ps. 22-23). |
| Psalms 25-34 | David's deliverance becomes a model or paradigm for Israel's own redemption (Ps. 25 and 34). |
| Psalms 35-41 | David's patience and hope through suffering becomes a model for future generations to wait patiently for deliverance. |

Psalms 3-14

Psalm 2 sets the tension between God's appointment of the Davidic king and the rebellious nations who don't accept his rule.

Psalms 3-7 explore this tension through the individual persona of David. Then, Psalm 8 creates an analogy between David's victory and the reign of the Genesis 1 "son of man" over the "beasts" and all humanity. Psalms 9-14 follow this trajectory by broadening the portrait of the enemies. They become "the wicked" and "the nations" who are then overcome by Yahweh on the day he arises (Ps. 13). The section closes with Psalm 14, which is a meditation on the character of the wicked and a cry for deliverance to emerge from Zion (hints at Ps. 2 to show the closure of a unit).

The persecuted David of the past (see the headings of Ps. 3 and 7) becomes a model of prayer and dependence for future generations.

David calls out for God to "rise up" and bring future vindication (Ps. 3:7, 7:6, 9:19, 12:5) and salvation (Heb. *yeshua* = Ps. 3:2, 7, 8; 6:4; 7:1; 9:14; 12:1; 14:6).

The focal point of God's salvation is the temple in Zion, as in Psalm 2 (Ps. 3:4, 5:7, 9:11, 11:3, 14:6).

Psalms 15-24

The section is framed by "temple entrance" poems (Ps. 15 and 24), which surround two sections focused on the future deliverance of the messianic King (Ps. 16-18 and 20-23). At the center is a Torah poem (Ps. 19).

The Symmetrical Shape of Psalms 15-24

| | | |
|----|--|--|
| A | Temple: Psalm 15 Requirements for entering Yahweh's presence are integrity and righteousness by the Torah | |
| B | Psalm 16 The king confesses confidence in Yahweh's power to deliver from distress | |
| C | Prayer for Deliverance: Psalm 17 Petition for deliverance in the midst of distress | |
| D | Royal Prayer: Psalm 18 The king's prayer telling the narrative of how YHWH delivered him from distress because he (1) cried out to Yahweh (v.7 ff.) and he (2) walked in integrity and righteousness (vv. 21-31) and (3) Yahweh has promised to deliver his "anointed one" (v. 51) | |
| E | Torah: Psalm 19 The king confesses that following Torah keeps one's life pure and righteous before YHWH | |
| D' | Royal Prayer: Psalm 20 Prayers of deliverance on behalf of the king Royal Prayer: Psalm 21 Yahweh answers the prayers for deliverance on behalf of the king | |
| C' | Prayer for Deliverance: Psalm 22 Prayer of the king in the midst of mortal distress (vv.1-22) and thanksgiving for deliverance (vv. 23-32) | |
| B' | Psalm 23 The king confesses confidence in Yahweh's compassion to deliver his king so that he may go up to Yahweh's presence in the temple | |
| A' | Temple: Psalm 24 Requirements for entering YHWH's presence are integrity and righteousness by the Torah (vv. 3-6) and proclamation of YHWH's kingship (vv. 7-10) | |

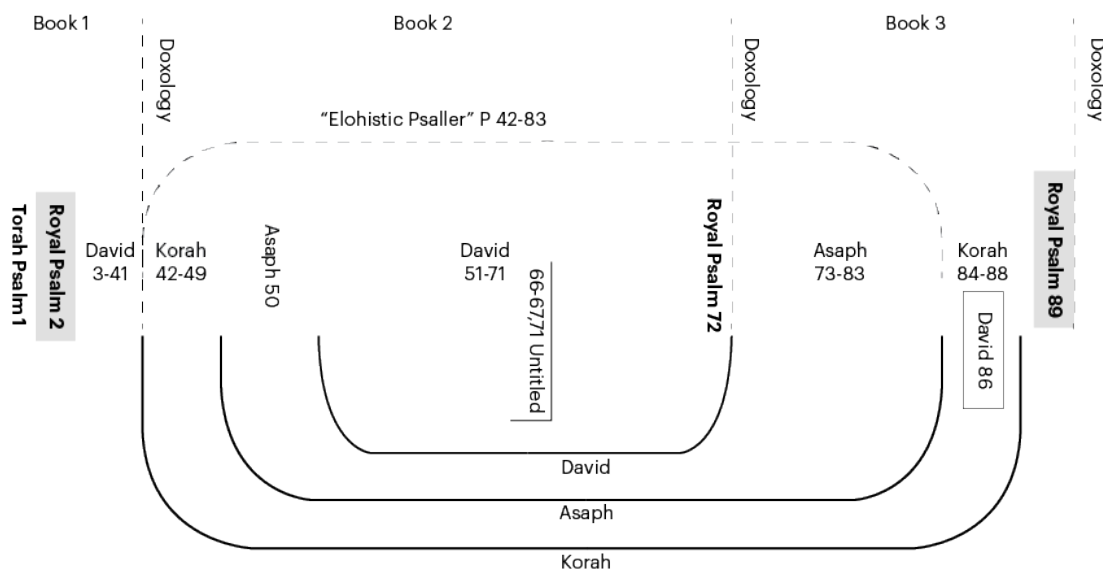
Psalms 25-34 and 35-41

This section is framed by three alphabet acrostic wisdom poems (Ps. 25, 34, 37). Psalms 25 and 34 both have redemption conclusions that stand outside the acrostic (Ps. 25:21 and 34:22) and refer back to Psalms 1-2.

This outer frame gives a corporate and future orientation to the David lament poems in Psalms 26-33, 35-36, and 38-41. David's individual deliverance becomes the paradigm of deliverance of the righteous from their troubles and enemies. David appeals for deliverance and vindication before his enemies in Psalm 28:6-9. David's greatest desire is to be in God's temple presence (Ps. 26:3-7, 27:1-5, 28:1-2). David's own journey of forgiveness and restoration (Ps. 32-33) becomes a model for future generations.

| | |
|----|---|
| A | Psalm 25: Acrostic poem + “O God, redeem (ה'רפד) Israel ...” (Ps. 25:22) |
| B | Psalm 26-33: David’s individual sufferings and deliverance |
| A | Psalm 34: Acrostic poem + “Yahweh redeems (ה'רפד) his servants ... and all who take refuge in him” (Ps. 34:23) |
| B' | Psalm 38-41: David’s individual sufferings and deliverance |
| A | Psalm 37: Acrostic poem + “Yahweh rescues the righteous from the wicked, for they take refuge in him.” (Ps. 37:40)) |
| B | Psalm 38-41: David’s individual sufferings and deliverance |

Literary Design and Main Themes of Books 2 and 3: Psalms 42-72 and 73-89



The entire composition of books 2 and 3 are arranged as a symmetry with a David collection at its center and as its conclusion.

| | | |
|----|--|--------|
| A | 42-49: Korah Psalms | Book 2 |
| B | 50: Asaph Psalm | |
| C' | 51-72: David Collection | |
| | Psalm 72: Transition from David (Ps. 1-71) to Solomon (Ps. 72) | |
| B' | 73-8:3 Asaph Psalms | Book 3 |
| A' | 84-89: Korah Psalms | |
| | Ps. 89: Transition from Solomon (Ps. 72) to the exile (Ps. 89) | |

The Korah Psalms (42-49 and 84-89)

These two collections develop the same themes in a parallel sequence. Both begin with poems that encourage piety and hope in God's promise, which is then anchored in the Jerusalem temple. This hope must be embraced despite a deep feeling of God's absence.

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Psalms 42-44 = Psalms 84-85 | Longing for the beloved divine presence in the temple + collective laments over Israel sin + hope in God's covenant love |
| Psalms 45-48 = Psalms 86-87 | Celebrations of God's royal power in Zion (Ps. 45-48) over all the nations who will one day be included among God's covenant people (Ps. 87) |
| Psalms 49 = Psalm 88 | Psalms that lament over human mortality and the ephemeral nature of life under the sin |
| Psalms 45-48 = Psalms 84-87 | Zion psalms that foster messianic hope |

The Asaph Psalms (50 and 73-83)

These poems highlight the existential crisis brought about by the exile (Ps. 73, 74, 79-80), and they promote hope in God's kingship (Ps. 75-76, 81-82).

Psalms 51, 72, and 89 are connected to the larger themes of messianic hope and exile that unite the TaNaK.

Psalm 51: The New Covenant

David's sin with Bathsheba brought divine judgment and repentance that led to restoration. This provides hope for the post-exilic community. See how Psalm 51:18-19 repurposes David's hope for future generations.

Psalm 72: The Messianic Kingdom

Solomon's reign as described in 1 Kings chapters 3-10 becomes a model of future hope for the messianic King who will fulfill God's promise to bless the nations through Abraham.

| |
|---|
| Psalm 72:8 = Numbers 24:19 and Zechariah 9:9-10 |
| Psalm 72:9 = Micah 7:17 |
| Psalm 72:15 = 1 Kings 10 and Isaiah 60:6 |
| Psalm 72:17 = Genesis 12:3 |

Psalms 89: Restoration from Exile

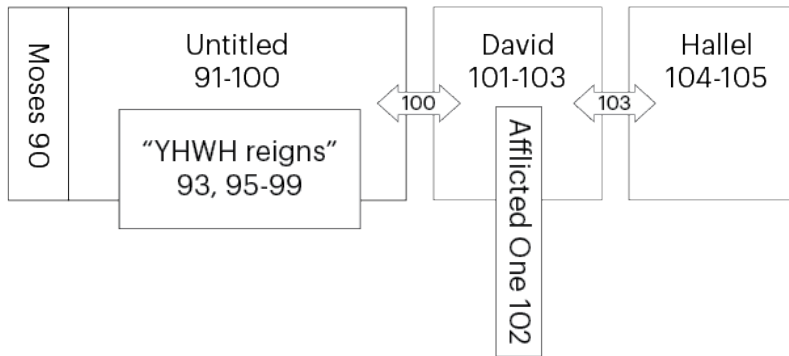
The Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the line of David poses a threat to God's covenant faithfulness promised to David in 2 Samuel 7.

In Psalm 89:46-48, the passing of the monarchy of Judah is compared to the larger existential crisis facing all mortal humans.

In Psalm 89:49-51, The downfall of the messianic line is connected to the persecution of God's servants. The poet petitions God on behalf of both.

Literary Design and Main Themes of Book 4: Psalms 90-106

The Design of Book IV



Psalms 90-92

Moses (Ps. 90) takes up his role as intercessor on Israel’s behalf with a series of allusions to the golden calf narrative of Exodus 32-34. He acknowledges Israel’s sin and frailty and asks God to allow their faithfulness to endure. Psalm 90:7-13 refers back to Exodus 32:11-14.

In Psalms 91-92, God promises vindication for those who remain faithful to him.

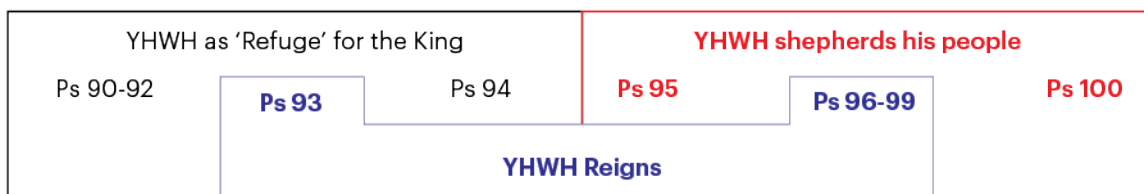
Psalms 93-100

The “Yahweh is king” psalms respond to the exile (Ps. 89) by reaffirming the climactic claim of the Song of the Sea (Exod. 15:18) that God is king of the nations.

These poems depict Yahweh as the ultimate ruler of all and use metaphors such as Yahweh is king, shepherd, most high, and judge.

Some poems envision the nations brought under God’s rule (Ps. 96, 98, 100) while others focus on the quality of God’s rule and the standards of final judgment (Ps. 94, 97, 99).

The Design of Psalms 90-99



Psalms 101-103

This mini David collection represents repentance in response to Psalms 93-100.

In Psalm 10, David is a model of recommitment to Yahweh’s standards of justice and piety.

In Psalm 102, we see the poor afflicted sufferer. This individual embodies the “suffering servants” of Zion who await the future fulfillment of all of God’s promises in the messianic Kingdom.

In Psalm 103, David blesses God as Israel’s forgiver and healer. Their future hope lies completely in God’s merciful character to keep his covenant promises.

Psalms 104-106

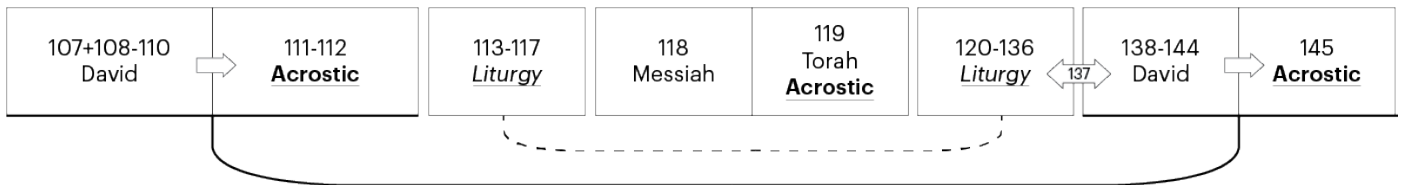
In Psalm 104, God’s work in creation displays his universal rule over all creation.

In Psalm 105-106, God’s work in Israel’s covenant history has been complicated and Israel is a mixed bag of faithfulness (Ps. 105) and total failure (Ps. 106).

This sets the tone for future hope because, despite Israel’s failure, God’s covenant promises rely solely upon his own faithfulness.

Literary Design and Main Themes of Book 5: Psalms 107-145

Book 5 has also been designed as a large symmetry.



Psalm 107 serves as the introduction to book 5. It is a poetic retelling of Israel’s history that shows how repentance and restoration are always possible with the God of mercy.

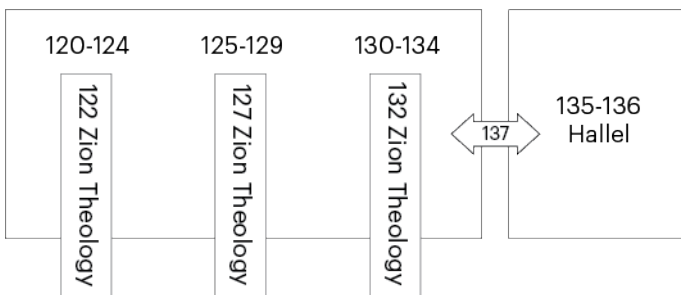
The poems in Psalms 108-110 give the promise of future vindication and victory for David and the future messianic Kingdom.

Psalms 111-112 are two acrostics that promote praise, wisdom, and the fear of the Lord.

Psalms 113-118 are “the great Hallel,” a collection that replays the Exodus themes (Ps. 113-114). All nations are called to turn from idols (Ps. 115) and to celebrate the royal rule of Yahweh the creator and deliverer (Ps. 116-117) who invites the redeemed into his temple presence (Ps. 118).

Psalm 119 is the largest acrostic poem of the Torah psalms.

Psalms 120-136 are known as the Psalms of Ascents (Heb. *ha-ma’alot* “the goings up” = return from exile).



Psalms 138-145 are the final David collection. David's petition (Ps. 138-144) concludes with an acrostic meditation on the hope of the Davidic covenant (Ps. 145, especially 145:13b in the ESV).

Psalms 146-150 are the five-part Hallelu-Yah conclusion.

The center poem, Psalm 148, is a summons for all creation in Heaven (Ps. 148:1-6) and on Earth (Ps. 148:7-12) to praise Yahweh for two reasons.

1. His glorious reputation stands above all creation (Ps. 148:13).
2. Because "he has lifted up a horn for his people."
 - a. Horn is a royal metaphor in the Hebrew Bible for the promised king from the line of David (see 1 Sam. 2:1, 10; 2 Sam. 22:3; Ps. 132:17).

Praise and Lament in the Psalms

Praise

Praise is a world-making act. It envisions the world in a way that is not obvious to everyone. Just as the righteous are those who suffer in the present, so they praise God for the world that is coming into being through his mighty deeds. Praise in the psalms has a future orientation.

Praise is about acknowledging God's rule over the world: "Yahweh reigns as king" (Ps. 93-100). This claim is not shared by all people, and so praise becomes a way to align ourselves with God's vision for the world. Real praise fosters a lifestyle that embodies the values of God's Kingdom.

Praise occurs within the matrix of pain. There are technically more laments than praise poems in the book, yet the book is titled "Praises" (Heb. *tehillim*).

Lament

Lamentations explores the back-and-forth of faith and despair as God's people wait on his promises. The poems are entirely human speech to God, which become God's word to his people in Scripture. Here, God shows that grief, lament, anger, and dismay are all appropriate ways of dealing with hardship and suffering.

Lament is a crucial part of dealing with grief because it allows us to fully face and name the pain. It allows for a future resolution and creates a place where we can move forward without feeling like the pain has been glossed over.

Lamentation names what is wrong, what is out of order in God's world, what keeps human beings from thriving in all their creative potential. Simple acts of lament expose these conditions, name them, open them to grief and anger, and make them visible for remedy. In its complaint, anger, and grief, lamentation protests conditions that prevent human thriving and this resistance may finally prepare the way for healing.

Kathleen O'Connor, "Lamentations," *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary Vol. 6*, 1012

Main Themes in the Book of Psalms

Yahweh's people living in the midst of exile must ground their faith on:

- The Torah (the foundation story) [Ps. 1]
 - Psalms that focus on the beauty of Yahweh's word: 19, 119
 - Psalms that retell the story of the Torah: 78, 105-106
- The Messiah (the coming deliverer) [Ps. 2, note Acts 2:29-30]
 - "Yahweh Reigns" psalms: 93-99
 - "Royal psalms" that anticipate a coming deliverer: 2, 20-23, 72, 110, 132, 148

In the midst of exile, we must fully acknowledge our suffering and wrestle with Yahweh about our difficulties and hardships.

- Lament psalms: 3-7, 9-10, 73, 88-89 (Focus Ps. 3-7, 73, 89)

We must wait on Yahweh and pray for future vindication in the midst of persecution and suffering.

- Imprecatory psalms: 58, 109, 137

Our final response to Yahweh should be trust in his promises and worship (focus: shift from lament to praise in the books of Psalms).

- Thanksgiving psalms: 30, 34, 116
- Praise psalms: 103, 113, 146-150