# INTRODUCTION TO PSALMS

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**I. The Title of the book of Psalms:**

    A. <u>Hebrew title</u>: תְּהִלִּים – (*Tehillim*, plural of תְּהִלָּה – *tehillah*) – meaning: praise, song of praise, hymn, psalm.

    B. <u>English title</u>:

        1. Septuagint (LXX) – *Psalterium* and thus "Psalter" in English, based on the Greek word for a stringed instrument. The Greek Old Testament (LXX), supposedly translated from the Hebrew by 70 men about 100-200 BC in Alexandria, Egypt.

        2. Latin translation: – Translated by Jerome from the Hebrew into Latin and called *Liber Psalmorum* or "The Book of Psalms," which he got from the Greek word πσαλμός – psalmos, meaning: music sung to stringed instruments.

**II. The Structure of the book of Psalms:**

    A. <u>There are 150 Psalms</u>.

    B. <u>The Psalms are divided into five books</u> (at least back to 200 BC as the LXX divides them):

        1. Book I – Psalms 1-41
        2. Book II – Psalms 42-72
        3. Book III – Psalms73-89
        4. Book IV– Psalms 90-106
        5. Book V – Psalms 107-150

    C. The last verse of the last Psalm of each Book is a "doxology;" and Psalm 150 is the "doxology" for the book of Psalms.

    D. <u>Reason for the divisions</u>:

        1. Some hold to the theory that the Books were ordered to mirror the Pentateuch.
        2. More likely, the order is just the way the Books were formed.

**III.** <u>History of the formation of the Book of Psalms and its divisions</u>:

    A. <u>Stage I</u>: Individual Poems like: Psalm 90 by Moses; Exodus 15 by Miriam; Judges 5 by Deborah; and Jonah 2 by Jonah.

    B. <u>Stage II</u>: Collections of Poems:

        1. There is an indication of a collection of Davidic Psalms in Psalm 72:20, *"the prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended."*

        2. Two books are implied in 2 Chron. 2:30, those of Asaph and of David. (Asaph's Psalms are mostly in Book III.)

        3. There is a collection known as the "Pilgrimage Psalms," Psalms 120-134.

C. <u>Stage III</u>:   There is a collection of smaller anthologies placed throughout the five
    books.

D, <u>Stage IV</u>:   Then there was the work of a final editor, possibly Ezra:
1. There seems to be an introduction to the whole Book of Psalms in the first two
   Psalms.
2. The conclusion to the book of Psalms seems to be found in Psalms 145-150.
3. There is much evidence throughout the book of Psalms that there is one
   ordering mind, someone obviously under the inspiration of God.

## IV. <u>The headings of individual Psalms</u>:

A. <u>Authorship of Psalm given</u>:
1. David – wrote 73 psalms (mostly in Books I and II)
2. Asaph – wrote 12 psalms (Psalms 50, 73-83)
3. Moses – wrote Psalm 90
4. Heman, the Ezrahite – wrote Psalm 88
5. Ethan, the Ezrahite – wrote Psalm 89
6. Solomon – wrote Psalm 72, 127

B. <u>Other information</u>:
1. Some types of psalms:
   a. *Mizmor*, a psalm; 57 total psalms, (i.e. 3, 4, 5, 6, 22)
   b. *Maskil*, a thoughtful poem; 13 total psalms, (i.e. 32, 88, 89, 142)
   c. *Miktam*, a pithy pointed message; 6 total psalms; (i.e. 56)
   d. *Shir*, a song; 15 total psalms, (i.e. 30, 45, 46)
   e. *Tipillah*, a prayer; 5 total psalms, (i.e. 17, 142)
   f. *Tihillah*, praise; (Psa. 145); the plural form is used for the title of Psalms.
2. Musical indicators – types of instruments, conductors, etc.
3. Historical notices – Inspired and very helpful to the reader

## V. <u>Hebrew Poetry</u>: **(All Psalms are poetry)**

A. <u>Meter</u>: The Hebrews used a rhythm pattern in their poetry, but we have been
   unable to discover it. (Psa. 3:1; 7:17)

B. <u>Parallelism</u>: (Almost all poetry breaks into two-line couplets.)
1. <u>Synonymous</u> – The second line repeats the same idea as in the first line but in
   slightly different words for EMPHASIS.
2. <u>Synthetic</u> – The second line adds information to the basic idea in the first line
   for INFORMATION.  (Psa. 95:3)
3. <u>Emblematic</u> – The main point given in one line and is illustrated in the other
   line for CLARIFICATION. (Psa. 42:1)
4. <u>Antithetical</u> – The first line makes a statement, and the second line states the
   opposite for a CONTRAST. (Psa. 1:6)

5. <u>Climactic</u> – The second line repeats part of the first line with its remaining part
   acting as synthetic parallelism for a CONCLUSION. (Psa. 95:1)
6. <u>Formal</u> – The two lines are joined only by grammar. (Psa. 2:6)

C. <u>Alphabetical Psalms</u>: The verses of the Psalm are arranged in an alphabetic
acrostic, in which each letter of the Hebrew alphabet is
used as the first letter in the first word of each line, used to
begin a fixed number of lines in succession. (Psa. 9, 10, 25,
34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145)

## VI. **Methods of Interpreting the Psalms:**

A. <u>The Traditional Historical Approach</u>:
Many scholars try to relate the psalm to some historical incident in the life of the
psalmist. However, it is best to use this method only when the superscription
clarifies the occasion and the person involved.

B. <u>The Form-Critical Approach</u>:
This approach associates all of the psalms with specific occasions in Israel's
worship and that they were to be sung as an accompaniment with some ritual act.
It lists the Psalms according to the characteristics which distinguish their types.
Many of the Psalms could be placed in several categories. There is also some
overlap of categories. The categorization of these different types varies from
scholar to scholar:

1. <u>Hymns</u> (Songs of Zion, etc.) - 46, 48,76
2. <u>Messianic Psalms</u> - 2, 16, 22, 45, 72, 96, 98, 110; some scholars list others.
3. <u>Songs of Yahweh's Enthronement or millennial psalms</u> - 47, 93, 95-99
4. <u>Laments of the Individual Psalms</u> - 3, 7, 12, 57; <u>Penitential Psalms</u> - 41, 51
5. <u>Laments of the People or communal lament</u> - 60, 124
6. <u>Royal Psalms</u> - 2, 18, 20, 21
7. <u>Praise or *Hallel*</u> (הַלְלֵל - Heb. - to praise) psalms - 41, 146-150
8. <u>Thanksgiving or *Hodu*</u> (הוֹדוּ - Heb. - give thanks) psalms of individual praise -
   107, 118, 136
9. <u>Minor types</u> (<u>pilgrim songs or processional psalms</u> - 120-134; <u>victory songs or
   triumphal psalms</u> - 68; <u>creation, psalms</u> - 8, 104,139)
10. <u>Prophetic Psalms</u> - 2, 45, 48
11. <u>Wisdom Psalms</u> - (<u>proverb poems,</u> - 1, 36; <u>riddle poems</u> - 19, 49;
    <u>*torah* or law</u> (תוֹרָה - (Heb. - law) <u>poems</u> - 78, 119;
    <u>*'ashre*</u> (אַשְׁרֵי - (Heb. - blessings) <u>poems</u> – 1, 32, 119)

C. <u>The Cultic Approach</u>:
This approach interprets the psalm in light of its function, in a cultic manner, by

attempting to associate the rituals mentioned with a specific occasion and to reconstruct that occasion at which the psalm was supposedly used.

   D. The Eschatological-Messianic Approach:
This approach interprets the Psalms almost exclusively as referring to Christ and His kingdom. As an example, the *"blessed man"* in Psalm 1 is seen as referring to Christ.

   E. A Balanced Literal/Historic Hermeneutical Approach:
The best approach to the interpretation of the Psalms is essentially eclectic. There is value and yet danger of extremism in all the above approaches. Furthermore, these approaches are not mutually exclusive of one another.

## VII. Facets of all Messianic Prophecies:

   A. Those that speak of the <u>First Advent only</u>. (Psalm 16:1-7; Isa. 7:14, 15; 50:4-9)

   B. Those that speak of the <u>Second Advent only</u>. (Daniel 7:13, 14)

   C. Those that speak of both the <u>First and Second Advent</u>. (Isa. 9:6, 7; 61:1-7; Zech. 9:9, 10)

   D. Those that present a <u>full Messianic resume</u>. (Psalm 110; Isa. 52:13-53:12)

## VIII. Types of Messianic Psalms:

   A. <u>Literal/purely prophetic Psalms</u>. - These psalms refer to the Lord Jesus Christ without reference to any other son of David. (Psalm 45, 110)

   B. <u>Eschatological Yahwistic Psalms</u>. - These psalms refer to the coming of Yahweh and the consummation of His kingdom. They will find their fulfillment, however, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Psa. 2, 72, 96-99)

   C. <u>Typological Messianic Psalms</u>. - In this type of Psalm, the subject of the psalm is in some feature a type of Christ. The truths concerning the psalmist find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ. - (Psa. 16, 22)

   D. <u>Typical or Applicational Messianic Psalms</u>. - In this type of psalm, the psalmist uses language to describe his present experience; but the language of the psalm goes beyond his own experience, and becomes historically true only in Jesus Christ. - (Psa. 34:20; 69:4, 5, 9)

   E. <u>Indirect/Analogical/correspondence Psalms</u>. - These psalms are those which at the time of composition had reference to a contemporary king or the house of David in general, but they await their final fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ. - (Psa. 2, 45; Psa. 69, 72)