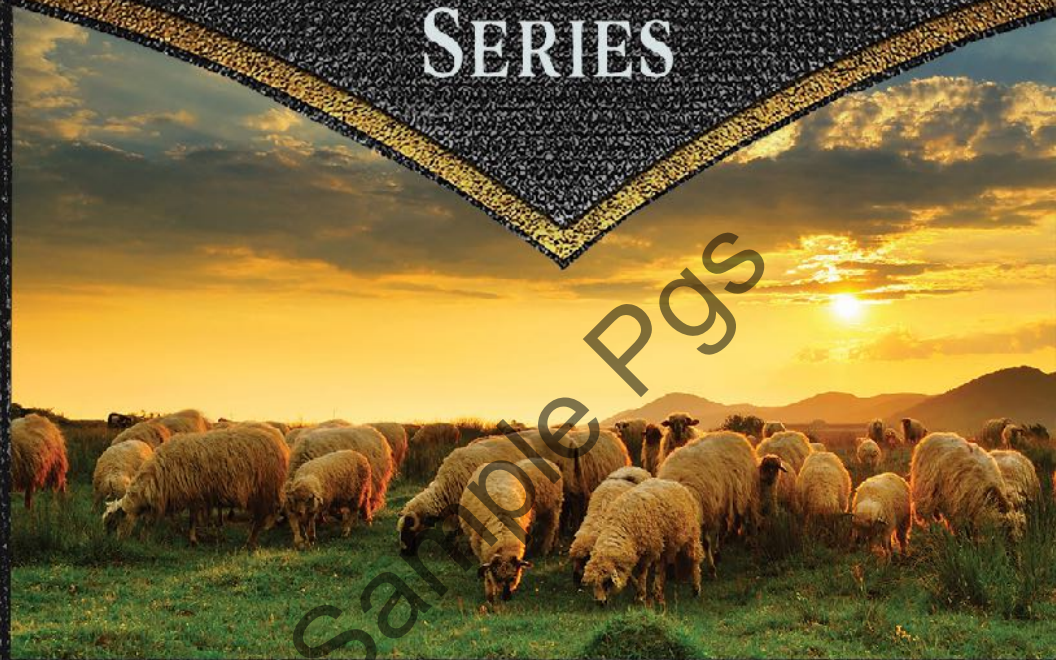


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PSALMS
VOLUME 1 OF 2

DAVID W. CLOUD

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*Psalms is a peerless book. There is nothing
like the Psalms in all of human literature*

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Introduction to Psalms

Outline of Introduction

The Splendor of the Psalms
Psalms a Song Book
The Authorship of the Psalms
The Collection of the Psalms
The Divine Inspiration of the Psalms
The Inscriptions to the Psalms
Selah in the Psalms
Acrostic Psalms
New Testament Quotations of the Psalms
The Prophetic Element of the Psalms
The Imprecatory Psalms
The Division of the Psalms

For a study of the “Major Themes of the Psalms,” “The Interpretation of the Psalms,” “The Psalms as a Biography of David,” and “Psalms of Degrees,” see *Mastering the English Bible - Job and Psalms*, www.wayoflife.org.

The Splendor of the Psalms

The book of Psalms is so magnificent that it is difficult to know where to begin in describing its glory. Psalms is a peerless book. There is nothing like the Psalms in all of human literature.

The Bible is God’s library composed of 66 books. Together, the books speak with one voice and are worth far more than all the treasures of the world. Each book is a rare jewel in its own right with its own particular message. Psalms is God’s hymn book, God’s worship book, God’s poetry book, God’s treatise on suffering, God’s comfort book, God’s book on prayer. Its Messianic prophecy is peerless. I love everything about the Psalms!

The Psalms cover every facet of human life and soul experience, every aspect of man’s relationship with God, every aspect of the saint’s experience in this world and the next. Reading the Psalms is like an experiential roller coaster ride. In one psalm, you are with

the psalmist in the midst of direst trouble, one's very life hanging in the balance, the soul cast down, fear on every hand, God seeming to be far away. In another psalm, you are with the psalmist in the transport of peace and joy, the trial past, the soul glorying in God for answered prayer and victory over one's enemies. In one psalm, you are with the psalmist in the midst of the day of Jacob's trouble, the Man of Sin running rampant over the saints, the believing remnant crying out to God for deliverance. In another psalm, you are with the psalmist in the midst of glorious worship in the millennial temple, not a care in the world, full of joy, sorrow and sadness having fled away, anticipating an eternity of pleasures in God's presence.

The Psalms were written during the Davidic kingdom 3,000 years ago, but they are perfectly fitting for the Church age. Here, we see the church-age believer's glorious God, lovely Saviour, preserved Scripture, new song, sure hope, persecution, trials, soul trouble, patient waiting, worship, congregational singing, and prophetic future.

Following are some testimonies to the Psalm's power and beauty:

"Here are 150 gems of divine inspiration" (Arno Gaebelein). These gems are far more valuable than earthly gems, such as the \$250 million blue Hope Diamond, and the \$72 million Pink Star diamond, the \$35 million Orange diamond, the \$20 million Moussaieff red diamond, the \$16 million Graff Vivid Yellow diamond, the \$30 million Perfect Ruby, the \$17 million Blue Belle sapphire, the \$12 million La Peregrina pearl, the \$5 million Rockefeller Emerald, and the \$1 million Virgin Rainbow Opal. The value of these magnificent gemstones is as nothing compared to that of any one of the psalms.

"Although all Scripture breathes the grace of God, yet sweet beyond all others is the Book of Psalms" (Ambrose).

"It might be called a little Bible" (Martin Luther).

"The whole inner life of the pious man is laid open, and Christians of all ages have here the temptations, conflicts, perplexities, doubts, fears, penitent moanings, and overwhelming griefs on the one hand, and the joy and hope of pardoning mercy, the victory over the seductions of false-hearted flatterers, and deliverance

from the power of Satan on the other, with which to compare their own spiritual exercises” (Jamieson, Fausset, Brown).

“What words can adequately introduce this Book of Psalms to us? Who shall say how much it has meant to godly hearts down the years? ... This Book of Psalms is a limpid lake which reflects every mood of man’s changeful sky. It is a river of consolation which, though swollen with many tears, never fails to gladden the fainting. It is a garden of flowers which never lose their fragrance, though some of the roses have sharp thorns. It is a stringed instrument which registers every note of praise and prayer, of triumph and trouble, of gladness and sadness, of hope and fear, and unites them all in the full multi-chord symphony of human experience” (J. Sidlow Baxter).

“The Book of Psalms has been a royal banquet to me, and in feasting upon its contents I have seemed to eat angels’ food. It is no wonder that old writers should call it--the school of patience, the soul’s soliloquies, the little Bible, the anatomy of conscience, the rose garden, the pearl island, and the like. It is the Paradise of devotion, the Holy Land of poesy, the heart of Scripture, the map of experience, and the tongue of saints. It is the spokesman of feelings which else had found no utterance. Does it not say just what we wished to say? Are not its prayers and praises exactly such as our hearts delight in? No man needs better company than the Psalms; therein he may read and commune with friends human and divine; friends who know the heart of man towards God, and the heart of God towards man; friends who perfectly sympathize with us and our sorrows, friends who never betray or forsake. ... They were the love songs of the people of God; could any others be so pure and heavenly? These sacred hymns express all modes of holy feeling; they are fit both for childhood and old age: they furnish maxims for the entrance of life, and serve as watchwords at the gates of death. The battle of life, the repose of the Sabbath, the ward of the hospital, the guest chamber of the mansion, the church, the oratory, yea, even heaven itself may be entered with psalms” (Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*).

“If I were to be marooned on a desert island with only one book of the Bible, I think I would choose the Psalms! Their range of subjects is so vast, their catalog of life’s experiences so full and their worship so exalted that I would be well supplied with rich

spiritual food and powerful fuel for praise and prayer for a long time to come” (*Believer’s Bible Commentary*).

Psalms a Song Book

The Psalms are God’s song book.

The title “Psalms” in the English Bible is from the Greek *Psalmoi*. It means “a poem to be sung to a stringed instrument.” It is the title that is used in the New Testament (Acts 1:20; Eph. 5:19). “This corresponds to the Hebrew word *mizmoi* by which sixty-five Psalms are designated in their inscriptions, and which the Syriac, a language like the Hebrew, uses for the whole book. It means, as does also the Greek name, an ode, or song, whose singing is accompanied by an instrument, particularly the harp (compare 1 Ch. 16:4-8; 2 Ch. 5:12, 13)” (Jamieson, Fausset, Brown).

The book of Psalms put to music is called a *psalter*. (The book of Psalms itself is also called a psalter.) This is from the Latin *psalterium*, referring to a stringed instrument.

“The Psalms are mostly lyrical poetry, that is, poetry adapted to the harp or lyre; to be used in connection with instrumental music; to be *sung*, not *read*” (Albert Barnes).

The Psalms have been sung by God’s people from time immemorial, beginning in the Davidic kingdom.

- David organized the continual singing of Psalms by the Levites in preparation for the building of the temple. This began when David brought the ark to Jerusalem (1 Ch. 15:1-28). See also 1 Ch. 16:4-6; 23:1-5; 25:1-31. David wrote Psalms specifically for use by the priests. See the headings to Psalm 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 31, 36, 39, 40, 41, 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 49, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 70, 84, 88, 109, 139, 140. Some of these psalms incorporate psalms David had written earlier. (For lessons from this, see the study on David in *Mastering the English Bible - Genesis to the Silent Years*, “David organizes the music worship for the temple.”)

- Solomon expanded this great musical worship enterprise with the completion of the temple (2 Ch. 5:12-13; 9:11). In the early part of Solomon’s kingdom, before his apostasy, the grand worship consisting of singing the Psalms to the accompaniment of musical instruments reached its zenith, and it must have been glorious indeed. Consider

this description of the dedication of the temple: “Also the Levites *which were* the singers, all of them of Asaph, of Heman, of Jeduthun, with their sons and their brethren, *being* arrayed in white linen, having cymbals and psalteries and harps, stood at the east end of the altar, and with them an hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets:) It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of musick, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the LORD” (2 Ch. 5:12-13).

- The public singing of the Psalms in the temple was revived whenever there was spiritual renewal in Israel. This happened in the days of **Jehoshaphat** (2 Ch. 20:18-22). It played a prominent role in the revival under **Hezekiah**, who restored the singing and playing that had been practiced in David’s day (2 Ch. 29:25-30). They used cymbals, harps, psalteries (a stringed instrument similar to a lyre or harp, probably with 12 strings), and trumpets, and they sang “praise unto the LORD with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer” (2 Ch. 29:30). The singing of the psalms was also revived in the days of **Josiah** (2 Ch. 35:15).

The Psalms have been used by the churches from their beginning. See Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; and James 5:13.

- In Ephesians and Colossians, we have the Holy Spirit’s instruction for congregational singing. The pronouns are plural, indicating that the subject is congregational singing rather than individual singing. “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19). “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16).

- Here we see a congregation of spiritual and biblical depth building itself up through the singing. We see the congregational singing as an essential part of the ministry described in Ephesians 4:16, “From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.” This is not a church in which the congregational singing is a mere tradition that is hurried through. It is not a church that sings mindlessly without understanding the purpose of the song

service. It is a church of born again people who are filled with God's Word and who are singing from the heart to God and to one another, singing with understanding, singing with purpose.

- This is a divinely-inspired educational course for congregational singing. This type of singing does not happen automatically. The church must be educated. The lessons from these passages must first be understood by the church leaders and music people, then the whole congregation must be instructed, from the youngest to the oldest. And the education must be given to each generation. It is a never-ending task.

- Churches have sung the Psalms throughout church history. We know they sang the Psalms in the early churches. In more recent times, the Protestants sang the Psalms. **The Scottish Psalter** was published by the Church of Scotland in 1650 and was the product of many years of labor and cycles of revision. Unlike Watts' Psalter, it covers most verses, and it stays closer to the biblical text than Watts. The psalms are paraphrased to be sung to meter. An edition of the Scottish Psalter is published by the Free Church of Scotland. It includes 193 songs, and each one can be sung to three or more tunes.

- **Isaac Watts** (1674-1748) published the most influential English psalter (1719). He is known as "the father of English hymnology." He spent 19 years producing his Psalter and wrote another 697 hymns. The Psalms are translated and adapted in such a way that they can be sung to one or more meters or tunes. Watts was a premillennialist who believed that Israel would return to the land and be converted.

- Old Baptists also sang the Psalms. The Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, England, has sung the Psalms since the pastorate of **John Rippon** (1751-1836). The church was named New Park Street Baptist Church, and he pastored it for 63 years (1773 to 1836). He published a hymnal in 1787 popularly called *Rippon's Selection*. (The full title was *A selection of Hymns from the best authors, intended as an Appendix to Dr. Watts' Psalms and Hymns*.) Rippon was considered the foremost authority on Isaac Watts' hymns. In 1801, he published a comprehensive edition entitled *An Arrangement of the Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs of the Rev. Isaac Watts, D.D.* **Charles Spurgeon** pastored Metropolitan Tabernacle from 1853 to his death in 1892. He took the ministry of singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs seriously and was careful about the selections as well as about every aspect of the congregational singing. Spurgeon published an update of Rippon's hymnal called *Our Own Hymn Book*. The first 150 selections

were Watts' psalter. Under the leadership of **Peter Masters** (since 1970), Metropolitan Tabernacle uses the same sacred music it used in Spurgeon's day, with additions representing the same theological depth and sacred style, avoiding a contemporary sound by conviction, with clear purpose and understanding. The 1991 edition of the Tabernacle's *Psalms & Hymns of Reformed Worship* has selections from Isaac Watts, Charles Wesley, Henry Lyte, Philip Doddridge, Nahum Tate, and others. They sing a lot of the Psalms, as we are commanded to do. The singing is accompanied by an organ which is played in a low key manner. Everything is focused on the lyrics and edification and singing from the heart to one another and to God, which is true biblical worship. The service is conducted in a serious demeanor; there is no flippancy. It is the opposite of the revivalist approach. We don't agree with the Tabernacle's "sovereign election" Calvinism--not even their evangelistic, "non-hyper" brand of it--but Baptists today could learn a lot from John Rippon and his heirs about congregational singing.

- For lessons on congregational singing, see *Mastering the English Bible - Romans to Thessalonians*, Ephesians chapter 5.

The Authorship of the Psalms

1. At least 93 of the psalms were written by **David**, "the sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Sa. 23:1). God's people have sung David's psalms for 3,000 years.

- 71 of the first 72 psalms are David's. A note at the end of Psalm 72:20 says, "The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended." Of those 72, one is attributed to Asaph (Ps. 50). We assume that the rest are David's. Psalm 2, for example, was spoken "by the mouth of thy servant David" (Acts 4:25). Since there are more of David's prayers after Psalm 72, what does the statement mean in verse 20 that the prayers of David are ended? (1) It is probable that this was the first collection of the Psalms that was made, and the other collections were added later. (2) It is possible that the statement means that the prayers of David find their fulfillment in the Messiah, since Psalm 72 is a major Messianic psalm.

- Eighteen of the rest of the psalms are attributed to David in the headers (Ps. 86, 101, 103, 108, 109, 110, 122, 124, 131, 132, 133, 138, 139, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145).

- The following three psalms were also written by David: Psalm 96 was written by David. It is a slightly modified edition of the psalm he wrote on the occasion of bringing the ark to Jerusalem. Compare 1 Ch.

16:23-33. Psalm 105 was written by David. Compare Ps. 105:1-15 with 1 Ch. 16:7-22. Psalm 127 is also written “for Solomon” and was doubtless penned by David.

- Other psalms that are not specifically attributed to David still have the *feel* and *sound* of his writings. Psalm 119 is an example. We agree with Charles Spurgeon who said: “It is Davidic in tone and expression, and it tallies with David’s experience in many interesting points. In our youth our teacher called it ‘David’s pocket book’, and we incline to the opinion then expressed that here we have the royal diary written at various times throughout a long life.”

- In conclusion, it is probable that David wrote all of the Psalms that are not specifically attributed to someone else. This would mean that he wrote 123 of the Psalms.

2. Eleven of the psalms are ascribed “**for the sons of Korah**” (Ps. 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 84, 85, 87, 88).

- These were not written *by* the sons of Korah but *for* them. Seven of them are in the section of Psalms attributed to David (Ps. 1-72). Only one of the psalms “for the sons of Korah” is specifically attributed to someone other than David, and that is Ps. 88, which is attributed to Heman the Ezrahite.

- Korah was a son of Levi who rebelled in the days of Moses (Nu. 16:1). That his sons are mentioned in the Psalms is a wonderful testimony of God’s grace. The sons of Korah were Levites who served in the tabernacle and in the temple. They are mentioned in 1 Chronicles 9:19 as being “over the work of the service, keepers of the gates of the tabernacle: and their fathers, being over the host of the Lord, were keepers of the entry.” Some of them were also singers (1 Ch. 9:33), and it was for these that the psalms were written to be sung in the Lord’s service.

- The psalms for the sons of Korah contain a large prophetic element and look forward to the time when God will judge Israel’s enemies and exalt her over the heathen (i.e., Ps. 46:9-11; 47:7-9; 48:1-2; 50:2-6; 85:1-3; 87:5-7).

3. Twelve of the psalms are ascribed to **Asaph** (Ps. 50, 73-83).

- He was the head of the tabernacle worship in Jerusalem under David (1 Ch. 16:4-7, 37).

- Asaph worked together with Heman and Jeduthun (Ethan) (1 Ch. 15:17, 19; 25:1, 6; 2 Ch. 5:12).

- Asaph is called a seer or a prophet in 2 Ch. 29:30.
- The sons of Asaph continued to lead the temple worship in the first temple (2 Ch. 35:15) and in Zerubbabel's temple (Ezr. 2:41; 3:10; Ne. 7:44; 11:22; 12:35).

4. One each of the psalms is ascribed to the following men:

- **Heman the Ezrahite** (Ps. 88). This might be the Heman mentioned in 1 Kings 4:31 as being one of the wise men who lived during the time of Solomon. This is the only psalm that is written from a perspective of no hope. This Psalm begins with the writer crying out to God day and night and ends with his friends far from him, and in between there is no deliverance or even expression of hope for deliverance. This is the perspective of Israel during the 2,000 years of her dispersion. It seems like there is no hope for deliverance
- **Ethan the Ezrahite** (Ps. 89). This is most likely Ethan the son of Kushaiah, who was one of the music directors appointed by David (1 Ch. 15:16-17, 19). He was one of the three chief musical Levites, together with Heman and Asaph (1 Ch. 15:19). From Psalm 89, we see that Ethan was a prophet like Asaph (2 Ch. 29:30) and Heman (1 Ch. 25:5). Another Ethan was a wise man who lived in the time of Solomon (1 Ki. 4:31). This might be the same man as Ethan the son of Kushaiah.
- **Moses** (Ps. 90)

The Collection of the Psalms

The psalms of David and Asaph were doubtless collected in their own lifetimes and guarded by posterity.

It appears that the Psalms were collected and compiled in stages. "There is some internal evidence in the Book of Psalms that the Jews collected the individual psalms and compiled them into groups in various stages and that this process took many years. We would expect this because some psalms date hundreds of years after others. Psalm 72:20, for example, seems to mark the end of a collection of David's psalms that antedated the Psalter we now have, but which editors incorporated into the larger work. Psalm 1 appears intended to introduce this collection and, probably later, the entire Psalter. The writer of most of the first 72 psalms (Books 1 and 2 of our modern editions) was David. Editors may have added those by Asaph ... (Ps. 42-50) to this collection later. Seventeen

psalms after Psalm 72 claim that David wrote them. Solomon (2 Ch. 5:11-14; 7:6; 9:11; Ec. 2:8), Jehoshaphat (2 Ch. 20:21-22), and Jehoiada (2 Ch. 23:18) all organized temple singing and may have had a hand in compiling some of the psalms” (*Constable’s Expository Notes*).

“As is true of modern hymnals, there are smaller collections of Psalms within the larger collections. These smaller collections include songs of ascent (Ps. 120-134), the writings of Asaph (Ps. 73-83), the psalms for the sons of Korah (Ps. 42-49), and the hallelujah psalms (Ps. 113-118, 146-150)” (Constable).

We know that in the reign of king Hezekiah, the psalms of David and Asaph were used (2 Ch. 29:30). It was probably during this time of revival that the book of Psalms was largely formed. We know that the Proverbs were collected at this time (Pr. 25:1).

The book of Psalms was probably finalized in its present form by Ezra. “Indeed all antiquity is nearly unanimous in giving Ezra the honour of collecting the different writings of Moses and the prophets, and reducing them into that form in which they are now found in the Holy Bible...” (Adam Clarke). This is based on information from Josephus and the rabbinical writings.

The psalms discovered in the Dead Sea scrolls, which date to about 150-200 BC and were based on older copies, are arranged as in our modern Bibles.

The Divine Inspiration of the Psalms

1. The Lord Jesus authenticated the divine inspiration and canonicity of the Psalms (Lu. 24:44).

He called the Psalms “Scripture” (Mt. 21:42; Ps. 118:22).

He said David spoke by the Holy Spirit. “For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The LORD said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool” (Mr. 12:36 citing Ps. 110:1).

2. The apostles taught that the Psalms were given by divine inspiration.

“... the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas ... For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take” (Ac. 1:16-20 citing Ps. 69:25 and 109:8).

“For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoyce, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption ... Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ...” (Ac. 2:25-31 citing Ps. 16:8-11).

“Lord, thou *art* God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ” (Ac. 4:24-26 citing Ps. 2:1-2).

3. The Psalms are quoted dozens of times in the New Testament and always with complete confidence in their divine authority.
4. The miraculous inspiration of the book of Psalms is evident in its content.

Nothing has ever come from man's pen to compete with the Psalms. It is a supernatural book upon its very face, and the more we study it, the more we are amazed at its words. “How came a shepherd boy to conceive so sublime a theme, and to write in so sublime a strain? Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (George Rogers).

It reveals the innermost thoughts and feelings of Almighty God and the intimate relationship between God the Father and God the Son, which is something that no man could describe apart from divine inspiration.

In Psalm 2, for example, we see God laughing in derision and speaking in His wrath toward those who oppose Christ and speaking to Christ to promise Him the kingdom.

In Psalm 16, we see Christ talking with God the Father and expressing His certainty that He will not allow Him to see corruption but that He will raise him from the dead (Ps. 16:10; Ac. 13:35-37).

In Psalm 22, we see God the Son on the cross separated from God the Father and uttering that pitiful cry, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

In Psalm 40, we see God the Son in the incarnation talking to God the Father and stating that He has come to do His will on earth (Ps. 40:6-10; Heb. 10:5).

In Psalm 45, we see God the Father “inditing a good matter” by thinking upon the Son and calling him “fairer than the children of men” and addressing him as “O God.” (That God is speaking in Psalm 45 is clear in Hebrews 1:8-9.)

In Psalm 68, we see God the Father speaking of Christ’s ascension and victory over the forces of evil (Ps. 68:18; Eph. 4:8).

In Psalm 89, we see God promising to make Christ His firstborn and to establish His covenant with him forever.

In Psalm 110, we see God talking to Christ in heaven and telling him to sit at his right hand until he has made His enemies his footstool and swearing to Christ that He has made him a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

It is obvious that the Psalms were either given by divine inspiration or they are a complete figment of man’s imagination, because no man can know such things apart from divine Revelation.

The Inscriptions to the Psalms

116 of the 150 Psalms are titled, and the remaining 34 are called “Orphan Psalms.”

We do not accept the theory that the inscription at the head of a psalm actually belongs at the end of the previous psalm. While it is

true that Habakkuk places his inscription at the end of his prophecy (“To the chief singer on my stringed instruments,” Hab. 3:19), there is no evidence that the psalmists did the same. (1) It would mean that the inscriptions are misplaced, and this would introduce error and confusion into the Scripture. (2) Further, it is plain that the inscriptions belong exactly where they are in the Hebrew Bible. For example, Psalm 3 begins with the words, “A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son.” That is exactly what we find in Psalm 3. “LORD, how are they increased that trouble me! many are they that rise up against me. Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God” (Ps. 3:1-2). But if the inscription to Psalm 3 was put at the end of Psalm 2, it would be meaningless and strange, as it does not fit the content of Psalm 2 in any way. The same is true of Psalm 51. The inscription says, “To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.” This is obviously the context of Psalm 51 and *not* Psalm 50.

Fourteen of the Psalms have inscriptions describing a historical situation, such as Psalm 3 and Psalm 51.

Thirty-nine of the Psalms have inscriptions that pertain to music, such as “to the chief Musician,” which appears in the inscriptions to 55 of the Psalms. This means the psalm was written for the Levitical worship that David established. See 1 Ch. 15:16-24 and 1 Ch. 25. Three of these inscriptions mention **Jeduthun** (Ps. 39:1; 62:1; 77:1). Also called Ethan (the son of Kushaiah), Jeduthun was one of the three chief musicians, together with Asaph and Heman. See 1 Ch. 15:16-17, 19; Ch. 16:41-42; 25:1, 3, 6; 2 Ch. 5:12. Jeduthun is called “the king’s seer” (2 Ch. 35:15). Jeduthun is probably “Ethan the Ezrahite” of Psalm 89.

Many unusual words appear in the inscriptions. In some cases, it might be that we can no longer determine with certainty what they originally referred to. The following are some of the words and their probable meanings:

Alamoth - Relating to maidens; a song for the sopranos (Ps. 46)
(John Phillips)

- Altaschith* - (Ps. 57, 58) *The Hebrew al tashet means "thou must not destroy" (Strong).* It probably refers to David's instruction that this psalm was to be kept as part of the divine hymnbook.
- Haggaion* - *A meditation* (Ps. 9:16). The Hebrew *higgaion* is also translated "meditation" (Ps. 19:14) and "solemn sound" (Ps. 92:3).
- Mahalath* - *Probably a type of instrument* (Ps. 53). It is called *Mahalath Leannoth* in Psalm 88)
- Maschil* - *Instruction, teaching, understanding* (Ps. 32, 44, 45, 53, etc.)
- Michtam* - *Engraven*, emphasizing permanence (Ps. 16, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60). The psalm was to be engraved in God's Word and engraved upon the hearts of the saints.
- Neginoth* - *Stringed instruments* (Ps. 4, 6, 54, 55, 67, 76). *Neginoth* is translated "stringed instrument" in Isa. 38:20 and Hab. 3:19.
- Shiggaion* - *Crying aloud* (either of grief or joy) (Ps. 7)

Selah in the Psalms

The term *selah* is used 71 times in the Psalms. It indicates a pause or interlude for a moment of meditation on what was just spoken. "It can be freely rendered, 'There! What do you think of that?'" (John Phillips). The instruments might have played alone during the interlude. "It means 'to pause,' with a secondary meaning 'to lift up.' We can take it as an indication that in reading we should pause, meditate and then lift up our hearts in praise and prayer" (*The Annotated Bible*).

This is proper biblical meditation, as contrasted with "contemplative prayer," which is non-thinking, mysticism. For example, *The Cloud of Unknowing* says, "Focus your attention on a simple word such as sin or God ... and WITHOUT THE INTERVENTION OF ANALYTICAL THOUGHT allow yourself to experience directly the reality it signifies" (chapter 36, p. 94). *The Cloud of Unknowing* is one of the Roman Catholic mystic writings that came out of the darkness of Catholic monasticism and has become popular throughout Christianity in our days.

Acrostic Psalms

“Another type of psalm, based on the form in which the writer set it rather than on the subject matter, is the acrostic. In these psalms each verse, or group of verses in the case of Psalm 119, begins with the succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The psalmists adopted this style so the Israelites could memorize and remember the psalm easily. This form also suggests a complete or exhaustive expression of the psalmist’s mind on his subject. The acrostic psalms are these: 9, 10, 25, 34, 38, 111, 112, 119, and 145” (Thomas Constable).

“This arrangement is not always perfect. Psalms 9 and 10 contain (the two together) the letters of the alphabet with several missing. Psalms 25 and 34 are also incomplete in the alphabetical scope. Psalm 38 has a perfect alphabetical character. ... The most perfect psalm in this respect is the longest in the Book, Psalm 119” (Arno Gaebelein).

New Testament Quotations of the Psalms

The Psalms are referenced in the New Testament far more than any other part of the Old Testament. There are roughly 400 quotations and references to the Psalms in the New Testament. (There are about 45 citations from Isaiah, the second most frequently quoted book.) Following are some of the major quotations:

Psalm 2:1-2 - Acts 4:25

Psalm 2:7 - Acts 13:33; Hebrews 5:5

Psalm 2:9 - Revelation 2:27; 12:5

Psalm 5:9 - Romans 3:13

Psalm 8:4 - Hebrews 2:6

Psalm 10:7 - Romans 3:14

Psalm 14:2 - Romans 3:11

Psalm 14:3 - Romans 3:12

Psalm 16:8 - Acts 2:25

Psalm 16:10 - Acts 13:35

Psalm 18:49 - Romans 15:9

Psalm 19:4 - Romans 10:18

Psalm 22:1 - Matthew 27:46

Psalm 22:8 - Matthew 27:43
 Psalm 22:18 - Matthew 27:35
 Psalm 22:22 - Hebrews 2:12
 Psalm 32:1-2 - Romans 4:6
 Psalm 36:1 - Romans 3:18
 Psalm 40:6 - Hebrews 10:5
 Psalm 41:9 - John 13:18
 Psalm 44:22 - Romans 8:36
 Psalm 45:6-7 - Hebrews 1:8-9
 Psalm 51:4 - Romans 3:4
 Psalm 69:4 - John 15:25
 Psalm 69:9 - John 2:17
 Psalm 68:18 - Ephesians 4:8
 Psalm 69:21 - John 19:28 and Matthew 27:48
 Psalm 69:22-23 - Romans 11:9-10
 Psalm 69:25 - Acts 1:20
 Psalm 78:2 - Matthew 13:35
 Psalm 78:24 - John 6:31
 Psalm 82:6 - John 10:34
 Psalm 91:11-12 - Matthew 4:6
 Psalm 95:7 - Hebrews 3:7
 Psalm 95:11 - Hebrews 4:3
 Psalm 102:25-27 - Hebrews 1:10-12
 Psalm 110:1 - Matthew 22:44; Acts 2:34-35; Hebrews 5:6
 Psalm 110:4 - Hebrews 6:20; 7:11, 17
 Psalm 116:10 - 2 Corinthians 4:13
 Psalm 117:1 - Romans 15:11
 Psalm 118:22 - Matthew 21:42; Acts 4:11
 Psalm 132:11 - Acts 2:30

Major Themes of the Psalms

Major Themes

God

Christ

The Word of God

Praise of God

The Blessed Man

Prophecy

The Judgment of the Ungodly
The Affliction of the Saints
God's Watchcare of the Saints
Righteousness
Judgment and Justice

The Prophetic Element of the Psalms

For the right interpretation of the Psalms, it is essential to understand the prophetic element. "The Book of Psalms is pre-eminently a prophetic Book. ... The prophetic scope of the Psalms is truly marvellous. Yet this feature of it is the most neglected in the study of the Book. It is rarely ever studied as a prophetic book; the devotional study has always been in the lead" (Arno Gaebelein, *The Annotated Bible*).

1. The words "for ever," "evermore," and "everlasting" appear an amazing 158 times in the Psalms. This is an eternal book!

2. Most of the New Testament quotations from Psalms deal with the prophetic aspect.

For example, Matthew quotes from Psalm 22 three times referring to Christ's crucifixion (Mt. 27:35, 43, 46), and Acts quotes twice from Psalm 2 and 16 referring to Christ's resurrection (Ac. 13:33, 35). Christ's crucifixion and resurrection were yet future and were thus prophetic when the Psalms were written.

3. In addition to the many Messianic prophecies that are already fulfilled, fifty-one (more than one-third) of the Psalms have major prophetic portions that are yet to be fulfilled.

The prophetic portions total at least 471 verses in the following psalms: Psalm 2, 9, 10, 18, 21, 22, 24, 25, 37, 45, 46, 47, 48, 50, 58, 60, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 71, 72, 75, 76, 78, 85, 87, 89, 92, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 108, 110, 118, 121, 122, 125, 126, 128, 132, 138, 145, 146, 147, 149.

Consider Ps. 10:16-18, "The LORD is King for ever and ever: the heathen are perished out of his land. LORD, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause

For a study of the “Major Themes of the Psalms,”
“The Interpretation of the Psalms,” “The Psalms as a
Biography of David,” and “Psalms of Degrees,” see
Mastering the English Bible - Job and Psalms,
www.wayoflife.org.

Expository Studies on the Psalms

Part One

Psalm 1-41 Introduction

This first section of Psalms contains the personal history of Christ. The trials of David look ahead to the trials of David's Son.

Many of the major Messianic prophecies are found in this section.

Christ is the godly Man (Psalm 1), the only begotten Son of God (Psalm 2), the last Adam who has dominion over all things (Psalm 8), the resurrected Holy One of God (Psalm 16), the One who suffers on the cross (Psalm 22), the Good Shepherd (Psalm 23), the coming King of Glory (Psalm 24), the Righteous one whose bones are not broken (Psalm 34), the One who is rewarded evil for good but endures to give thanks in the great congregation (Psalm 35), the One who comes to accomplish God's will (Psalm 40), and the One who is betrayed (Psalm 41).

Psalm 1

Forming the introduction to the entire book, Psalm 1 is very important.

It describes two kinds of men: the blessed and the ungodly. It describes two ways man can take, the way of blessing and the way of cursing.

It describes the way of spiritual victory through separation from sin and error and devotion to God's Word.

The emphasis is on the Word of God. Psalm 1 teaches us that the man of God must be immersed in God's Word. It must fill his mind and be reflected in his life. All blessing flows from this. Apart from God's Word, there is no right knowledge of God, of life, of God's will, no truth, no wisdom, no light.

Psalm 1 and 2 are interconnected. Psalm 1 describes the life of the blessed man, and Psalm 2 describes the redemption of the blessed man. He is the man who puts his trust in Christ (Ps. 2:12).

THE GODLY (Psalm 1:1-3)

The blessing of the godly (Ps. 1:1-3)

1. He is blessed because he rejects sin and error and wrong associations (Ps. 1:1). Separation is a necessary part of doing God's will and spiritual victory. Compare Romans 12:1-2.

Note the detailed description of the blessed man's separation:

- He does not walk in *THE COUNSEL* of the ungodly. *Counsel* refers to instruction, learning, philosophy, teaching, doctrine, advice. The godly man has only one authority, and that is God's Word, and he rejects all instruction that is contrary to it. He knows that he lives in a dark world filled with lies and errors; he, therefore, diligently tests everything by God's Word (Ac. 17:11; 2 Co. 10:5; 1 Th. 5:21; 1 Jo. 4:1). He is not gullible or careless (Pr. 14:15; Eph. 4:14). He knows that it is wise to seek counsel, but the counsel must first be from God's Word and second from saved people who are walking in the fear of God (Pr. 20:18; 24:6).

- He does not stand in *THE WAY* of sinners. The *way of sinners* refers to their lifestyle, the way sinners live, the actions and habits that are peculiar to sinners. The way of sinners is summarized in 1 John 2:16 as "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." It encompasses everything that is sinful and contrary to the will of God. To refuse to stand in the way of sinners requires separating from the world's immodest and unisex fashions, its pagan music, its depraved dancing, its lascivious movies and television programs, its depraved social media, its dissolute parties, and anything else that is characterized by "the way of sinners." "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph. 5:11).

- He does not sit in *THE SEAT* of the scornful. Not only does the blessed man not occupy himself in scorning the things of God, he refuses even to sit in the seat of those that do. A seat is a position of authority and influence. The seat of the scornful is a position of authority and influence that is owned by or controlled by the scornful who openly mock the things of God. The scornful are on every hand in these last days. They attack the authority of the Bible. They ridicule Jesus Christ. They use God's name in vain. They despise godliness and rejoice in debauchery. They appear under the names of humanists and evolutionists and modernists. To refuse to sit in the seat of the scornful requires that the godly individual reject and avoid any position or station or employment that is associated with scorning and blatant

The ungodly in judgment (Ps. 1:5-6)

The ungodly “shall not stand in the judgment” (Ps. 1:5). To “stand in judgment” means to be found innocent or to be justified, but the ungodly shall not stand in judgment because he dies in his sin and stands before a holy God without a Saviour. The ungodly will be condemned in judgment at the Great White Throne (Re. 20:11-15).

The ungodly shall not stand “in the congregation of the righteous” (Ps. 1:5). The ungodly are not born again through faith in Jesus Christ; therefore, they are not adopted members of God’s family (Ga. 3:26).

The “way of the ungodly shall perish” (Ps. 1:6). Not only will the ungodly himself perish, so will his way. “For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be” (Ps. 37:10). The way of the ungodly is the way of sin and rebellion and stubbornness and self-centeredness and pride and following after the lust of the flesh, but that way will perish. In the vision of Daniel 2, the wicked kingdoms of this present world are utterly smashed at Christ’s return and replaced with His eternal, righteous kingdom (Da. 2:34-35, 44-45). In the New Jerusalem, the former things, the way of the ungodly, will have passed away and God will make all things new (Re. 21:4-5).

Psalm 2

Psalm 2 describes the folly of the unsaved nations when they determine to resist God and His Anointed. It describes the great rebellion of the end times.

First we see the rage and rebellion of the nations (Ps. 2:1-3).

- The “heathen” refer to the pagan nations that are separate from Israel and outside of her covenant relationship with God. The Hebrew word *goy* it is also translated “nations” (Ps. 9:17). The heathen are those that have forgotten the true God of the Bible (Ps. 9:17), do not call upon His name (Ps. 79:6), and worship idols (Ps. 135:15).

- The heathen rage against God. This is a strong word and it aptly describes the attitude of the unsaved toward God. The world today is filled with rage and blasphemy against the Almighty. Through Hollywood, television, literature, news media, social media, education,

fashion industry, art. They rage by false religion, by communism, by evolution, by atheism, and by the homosexual rights movement. Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu said, "I would refuse to go to a homophobic heaven. No, I would much rather go to the other place. I would not worship a God who is homophobic" (*BBC News*, July 26, 2013). Television personality Bill Maher said, "the God in the Old Testament is a psychotic mass murderer" (July 26, 2013). In 2012, American Atheists purchased a billboard ad campaign calling Jesus a "useless Savior." Rage against God is a chief characteristic of western pop culture which has spread throughout earth. "... rock and roll has truly become a universal language ... rock and roll refers to an attitude, a feeling, a style, a way of life..." (*Rock Facts*, Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and Museum, 1996). That attitude and way of life is rebellion and licentiousness. "I'm free to do what I want any old time" ("I'm Free," Rolling Stones, 1965). The world rages against God by rejecting the gospel of Jesus Christ. A preacher told me that in London, England, in his experience, only one in 100 people will even take a gospel tract.

- The heathen have been raging against God since man's fall and since Cain rejected God's Word and went out from God's presence and built a society (Ge. 4), which was the beginning of the world system, but the rage has grown in intensity through the centuries. It resulted in Christ's rejection and crucifixion. He came into the world but the world said, "We will not have this man to rule over us" (Lu. 19:14). The rage is getting ever louder, and it will culminate in one final raging generation that will be destroyed at Christ's return. The age-long rebellion will culminate in the armies of the world aligning themselves to fight against Christ at His return (Joe. 3:9-14; Re. 14:17-20; 19:11-21).

- The heathen rage against God's authority and His holy laws (Ps. 2:3). They want to cast off His cords and live according to the lust of their flesh and follow the dictates of their vain imaginations. They want to be free to fulfill the lusts of their flesh without restraint.

- The heathen rage against the God of the Bible and His Christ ("against the LORD, and against his anointed," Ps. 2:2).

- The heathen take counsel together. They are unified in their objective to throw off God's law. We might see a hint here of the communication technology of the last days, whereby men can communicate their rage against God instantly from one end of the earth to the other, both by voice and picture.

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