

# **Grand Avenue Baptist Church**

## ***“Songs for Sojourners”***

**An Introduction for  
Psalms Book One  
Sermon Series  
(Psalms 1-41)**

# Introducing the Psalms

## I. The Impact of the Psalms on the Spiritual Heart:

Before we break down the technical characteristics and structure of the Psalms, let's consider how the Psalms might impact our lives as we study them in detail. We want them to work deep into our hearts. Consider the impact of the Psalms on Martin Luther. It was while translating the Psalms in 1519, line by line and word by word, that Luther himself was still unconverted. Luther writes of his conversion:

*In that same year, 1519, I had begun interpreting the Psalms once again . . . I had conceived a burning desire to understand what Paul meant in his Letter to the Romans, but thus far, there had stood in my way, not the cold blood around my heart, but that one word which is in chapter one: 'The justice of God is revealed in it.' I hated that word, 'justice of God', which, by the use and custom of all my teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically as referring to formal or active justice, as they call it, i.e., that justice by which God is just and by which He punishes sinners and the unjust . . . I meditated night and day on those words until at last, by the mercy of God, I paid attention to their context: 'The justice of God is revealed in it, as it is written: "The person lives by faith."' I began to understand that in this verse, the justice of God is that by which the just person lives by a gift of God, that is, by faith. I began to understand that this verse means that the justice of God is revealed through the Gospel, but it is a passive justice, i.e., that by which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written: 'The just person lives by faith.' All at once, I felt that I had been born again and entered into paradise itself through open gates. (Lawson, 26-27)*

Scholar Christopher Ash says using the Psalms in corporate worship becomes a means of grace to be filled with the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 5:18-20, the Apostle Paul prohibits getting drunk but exhorts us to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The emphasis falls on the exhortation to be filled, and he uses five participles for emphasis. The second and third participles have their roots in *song* and *psalms*. Ash goes on to say that there are *eight ways* the Psalms impact our lives:

1. **The Psalms are linked to being filled with the Spirit** (see above).
2. **The Psalms are linked to the filling of the Holy Spirit in the corporate life of the Church.** As we practice Ephesians 3:18-21 and Colossians 3:16, we are filled with the Spirit.
3. **The Psalms are intimately linked to our life in Christ.** In Colossians 3:16, *the word of Christ* is a word that consists in the message of Christ. Our teaching and admonishing of one another is achieved precisely by singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Those who are exhorted to sing are men and women who are *in Christ; have been raised with Christ; are hidden with Christ; Christ is their life; have the peace of Christ; do everything in the name of Christ; Christ shines in their lives; they understand the will of the Lord; they give thanks to Christ; and they submit to one another.*
4. **The Psalms promote and shape a Godly life.** The Psalms help us to think more deeply about the will of the Lord so that we understand it in order to live it out. So, the Psalms are not an aimless expression of an emotion-filled faith. In them, we do not hear the voice of men thinking noble thoughts but rather the voice of God himself who speaks in his Spirit to human hearts, to exhort and comfort, to instruct and assist. The Psalms teach us to edify the church and exhort us to godliness.
5. **The Psalms teach us to pray and praise.** We need to be taught to pray and praise God.
6. **The Psalms encapsulate the message of all of scripture.** The Bible Project says that each psalm has been carefully crafted and placed in the place it is in order to create a storyline from beginning to end. The Psalms tell the literary redemptive story in poetic form. They invite us to the literary temple of God. Luther says:

*The Psalter ought to be a precious and beloved book, if for no other reason than this: it promises Christ's death and resurrection so clearly – and pictures his kingdom and the condition and nature of all Christendom – that it might well be called a little Bible. In it is comprehended most*

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*beautifully and briefly everything that is in the entire Bible. It is really a fine [concise handbook]. In fact, I have a notion that the Holy Spirit wanted to take the trouble himself to compile a small Bible... so that anyone who could not read the whole Bible would hear [in the Psalms] have almost an entire summary of it, comprised in one little book.*

Calvin famously said that there is nothing “*which relates to the knowledge of eternal salvation*” that is lacking from the Psalms. “*What is there necessary for man to know which the Psalms are not able to teach?*,” asks Richard Hooker (ca. 1554-1600).

7. **The Psalms are a corrective against an idiosyncrasy of individualistic piety.** Luther observes:  
*The Psalter holds you to the communion of the saints and away from sects, for it teaches you in joy, fear, hope, and sorrow to think and speak as all saints have thought and spoken. In a word, if you would see that holy Christian church painted in the living color and shape, comprehended in one little picture, then take up the Psalter.*
8. **The Psalms shape all human life.** Athanasius writes that “*in the Book of Psalms, the one who hears... comprehends and is taught in it the emotions of the soul.*” Luther compares the human heart to a ship on a wild sea, driven by the storm winds from the four corners of the world. He says:  
*Here it is stuck with fear and worry about impending disaster; there comes grief and sadness because of present evil. Here breathes a breeze of hope and of anticipated happiness; there blows security and joy in present blessing. He goes on to ask, ‘What is the greatest thing in the Psalter but this earnest speaking of the saints amid these storm winds of every kind?’ Precisely because the Psalms span the whole gamut of human experience, the Psalter is the book of all saints; and everyone, in whatever situation he may be, finds in that situation psalms and words that fit his case, that suit him as if they were put there just for his sake, so that he could not put it better himself, of mind or wish for anything better.*

Calvin calls the Psalms, “*an anatomy of all the parts of the soul*” because “*there is not an emotion of which anyone can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. Or, rather, the Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life of all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated.*”

The Psalms express all vicissitudes, and the sweeping emotions, the affections, and the longing of the human heart. But they do more than simply express things; they reshape them. The work of the gospel goes deeper than reforming our actions and worlds; it renews our hearts. Our affections, desires, and aversions are disordered . . . The Psalms are one of God’s preeminent instruments to “*order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men.*”

Steve Lawson says the Psalms are as deep as the ocean and as wide as the human experience (Lawson, 14). Modern worship uses very little to no readings. Psalms give us the words for worship when our hearts are empty from a difficult and painful season of life. They allow us to speak back to God His words. Have you ever come to a worship service and your heart has been empty and hurt because of a hard week? Perhaps you’re not good at praying; Psalms give us words to help us pray. It builds unity in the congregation as the body of Christ sings, prays, and reads the Psalms together.

Lawson goes on to say the Psalms are built upon the absolute sufficiency of Scripture. That truth is found in Psalm 19:7-9, where we find six descriptions of God’s word (44-46).

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1. **Scripture Restores the Soul:** Scripture is *perfect*. In other words, it is whole, complete, comprehensive, and sufficient. The effect of the Word, when explained and brought to bear upon one's life, is seen in its supernatural ability to *restore the soul* (Ps 19:7a, 44).
2. **Scripture Instructs the Simple:** Scripture is the *testimony of the Lord* (Ps 19:7b). It is God's outspoken witness to man. The *word* is *sure*, indicating that it is absolutely reliable, trustworthy, unwavering, and immovable. It is always making the simple wise. It provides God-given insight to the simple.
3. **Scripture Rejoices the Heart:** The word of God is *right*. It reveals the right and proper path to follow in life. It affects the heart, causing it to rejoice and be glad. It gives true happiness and lasting contentment, which only God can give.
4. **Scripture Enlightens the Eyes:** The Lord's commands are *pure*. They are the light of God to the heart and mind. They bring dark things to light, bringing eternal realities into focus, and giving light to those who are in darkness concerning God's ways (Ps 119:30, 105).
5. **Scripture Endures Forever:** The Law of God is *clean* and has no impurities whatsoever. Because it is *clean and perfect in every way*, it will endure forever. It is permanent.
6. **Scripture is Righteous Altogether:** Scripture contains God's revelation to man; thereby, when man obeys it, it will produce righteousness.

## II. Understanding the Psalms

1. Who are the authors of the Psalms?
  - a. David (73 Psalms)
  - b. Asaph (12 Psalms)
  - c. Sons of Korah (11 Psalms)
  - d. Heman & Ethan (2 Psalms)
  - e. Solomon (2 Psalm)
  - f. Moses (1 Psalm)
  - g. Anonymous (49)
2. Where and when were the Psalms written?
  - a. They were written in various locations and eventually collected over about one thousand years.
  - b. They were primarily written for a Jewish audience to be used in various locations.
  - c. Psalms are Hebrew poetry, so some poems were written and sung by choirs while others were sung in families.
  - d. Over the centuries, the most important and widely read and sung poems were compiled for use on special occasions.
  - e. The events described in the Psalms span several centuries during Israel's history. Editors and compilers arranged the book of Psalms during the period after Israel's exile to Babylon.
  - f. The Psalms are a collection of 150 ancient Hebrew poems, songs, and prayers that come from different eras in Israel's history. Seventy-three of these psalms are attributed to King David, who was a poet and harp player (1 Sam. 16; 2 Sam. 23). Additionally, many other authors were involved. Asaph wrote 12 poems, the sons of Korah produced 11, and other worship leaders in the temple contributed as well (Heman and Ethan wrote one each; see 1 Chronicles 15:17-19). Two are connected to King Solomon and one other to Moses. Nearly one-third of the poems (49, to be exact) are anonymous.

Many of these poems were used by Israel's temple choirs (1 Chronicles 25; Neh. 11:22-23), but the book of Psalms is not a hymnbook. In the period after Israel's exile to Babylon, these ancient songs were gathered together with many other Hebrew poems and intentionally

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arranged into the book of Psalms. The entire work has a unique design and message that you won't notice unless you read it from beginning to end.

## 3. The intended purpose of the Psalms.

The book of the Psalms has been expertly crafted and placed in the order it is in so that all of the Psalms together (taken as a whole) create a storyline from beginning to end. The Psalms tell the redemptive story of God's people in poetic form. They invite God's people into God's presence while they are in exile and sojourners.

The Psalms function like a literary temple for God's people. In ancient Israel, Jerusalem was where you went to meet with God. The temple was filled with art and structured to teach the redemptive story, showing that God reigns and rules the world. To be in God's temple was to be in God's presence, sort of like being in His living room. What this means is that when you read the Psalms, you are ushered into the poetic literary temple in God's presence, where you read God's words back to Him by His Spirit. You are immersing yourself in the redemptive story of God's Kingdom.

So, think of when the Israelites were in exile. They were no longer in Jerusalem and did not have access to the temple. How would they meet with God? This is where the Psalms came in for them. The Psalms is a book for exile and is designed to lead us into God's presence, kind of like a virtual temple. You enter the Psalms to meet with God and to sing His songs back to Him.

Keep in mind that David wrote before the temple was built, so his prayers looked forward to that time of being in God's presence. Then, when Israel was exiled, they didn't have God's temple either, so they looked back to the temple and God's presence. Because David longed to be in God's presence, his prayers easily became the exiles' prayers. David gave his people words to pray and sing when their hearts were broken to the point where they had no words to express their sorrow. It appears that those who wrote in later generations drew inspiration from King David. So, they wrote psalms and prayers to sing, lament, confess, and praise God (Bible Project).

The Big Idea: Psalms teaches us to neither ignore our pain nor let it determine our lives. God will fulfill his promises from the Torah and send the Messiah. This book is all about the lament, praise, faith, and hope of God's people.

## III. Content and structure of the Psalms

### 1. The structure of the Psalms: The book of Psalms is divided into five books, with Psalms 1-2 serving as an introduction or preface to the entire collection.

- a. Preface (1-2)
- b. Book 1 (3-41)
- c. Book 2 (42-72)
- d. Book 3 (73-89)
- e. Book 4 (90-106)
- f. Book 5 (107-150)

### 2. Summary of the content of the Psalms Books 1-5

*The Preface (Psalms 1-2):* Psalms 1 and 2 serve as the book's introduction and introduce the key themes in the Psalms. These psalms clearly stand apart from the rest of Book One based on their authorship. They are anonymous, while the majority of psalms in the first book are linked to King David. Their content is also unique.

Psalms 1 starts by celebrating the person who is "blessed" because they meditate on the Torah, prayerfully reading and obeying it. The Hebrew word *torah* simply means "teaching," but it also refers to the first five books of the Bible that contain the foundational laws of Judaism. It seems that the word has both of these

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meanings in Psalm 1. The Book of Psalms is presented as a poetic version of the Torah, instructing God's people in the lifelong practice of prayer as they strive to obey the commands of the original Torah.

Psalm 2 is a poetic reflection on God's promise to King David, recounted in 2 Samuel 7. God told David that from his line would come a messianic (that is, "anointed") King, who would establish God's Kingdom over the world, defeating evil and rebellion among the nations. The psalm concludes by saying that all those who take refuge in this messianic king will be "blessed," the same word used in the opening of Psalm 1.

Together, these two poems reveal that the Book of Psalms is intended to serve as the prayer book of God's people, who strive to be faithful to the commands of the Torah and hope for and wait for the messianic kingdom.

*Book 1 (Psalms 3-41): Key Theme: The Foundation of Covenant Faithfulness.* With these themes introduced, we can begin to see intentionality in how the smaller books have been designed around the same ideas. For example, Book One contains a collection of poems (Ps. 15-24) that opens and closes with a call to covenant faithfulness. The opening Psalm 15 is followed by three poems (Ps. 16-18) that depict David as a model of such faithfulness, calling out to God for deliverance and being rewarded and elevated to the throne as king. These three have a symmetrical pair in Psalms 20-23, where the David of the past has become an idealized image of the future messianic king, who will call upon God for deliverance and be rewarded with a kingdom over all nations. And right in the center of this collection is Psalm 19, a poem dedicated to praising God for the gift of the Torah. This is a great example where we see that the twin themes from Psalms 1 and 2 emerge with intentional clarity.

*Book 2: Psalms 42-72: Key Theme: Hope for the Messianic Kingdom.* Psalms 42-72 opens with two poems united in their hope for a future return to the temple in Zion (Ps. 42-43), an image closely associated with the hope of the messianic kingdom. Book Two closes with a corresponding poem that depicts the future reign of the messianic king over all nations (Ps. 72). This poem echoes many other passages in the Prophets about the messianic kingdom (Is. 11, 45, 60; Zech. 9) and concludes by saying that this king's reign will bring the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham by bringing God's blessing to all nations (Ps. 72:17; see Gen. 12:3; Gen. 22:17-18).

*Book 3: Psalms 73-89: Key Theme: Hope for the Messiah After Exile.* Psalm 73-89 also concludes with a poem reflecting on God's promise to David (Ps. 89), but this time in light of the tragedy of Israel's exile. The poet recalls how God promised that He would never abandon the line of David. But how does that promise align with Jerusalem's destruction and the downfall of David's line? The poem concludes (Ps. 89:49-51) by asking God to remember his covenant with David and to forgive his people.

*Book 4: Psalms 90-106: Key Theme: The God of Israel as the King of All Creation.* Psalms 90-106 are designed to respond to this crisis. In the opening poem, we return to Israel's roots with a prayer of Moses (Ps. 90), describing his plea for God's mercy after the golden calf incident. The center of Book Four is dominated by a group of prayers (Ps. 93-99) that announce the Lord God of Israel as the true King of all creation. The trees, mountains, and rivers are summoned to celebrate the future day when God will bring his healing justice and Kingdom over all the world.

*Book 5: Psalms 107-150: Key Theme: Songs of Ascent and Poems of Praise.* Psalm 107-145 opens with a series of poems (Ps. 107-110) that affirm that God hears the cries of his people and will one day send the future King to defeat evil and bring about his Kingdom. It also contains two larger collections called the "Hallel" (Ps. 113-118) and the "Songs of Ascents" (Ps. 120-136), both of which conclude with poems about the hope of the messianic kingdom (Ps. 118 and 132). Right between these collections is Psalm 119, the longest poem in the book of Psalms. It is composed in the order of the Hebrew alphabet and explores the wonder and beauty of the Torah as God's word to his people. We see the themes from Psalms 1 and 2, the Torah, and the messianic hope combined here in Book Five.

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*The conclusion of the Book of Psalms is Psalms 146-150.* This brings us back to the final, five-poem conclusion to the book of Psalms. In the center, Psalm 148 says that all creation is summoned to praise the God of Israel because he has “raised up a horn for his people” (Ps. 148:14). This is a metaphor of a bull’s horn raised in victory. The image echoes back to the same metaphor used in Hannah’s song (1 Sam. 2:10) and earlier in Psalm 132:17. The horn is a symbol of the messianic king and his victory over evil—a fitting conclusion to this book (Bible Project).

3. *Understanding the overall design of the Book of Psalms:* To see the book’s overall design, it’s actually helpful to start at the end. The book concludes with five poems of praise to the God of Israel (Ps. 146-150), each beginning and ending with the word “hallelujah.” In Hebrew, this word is a command telling people to “Praise Yah,” which is an abbreviation of the divine name, Yahweh. This neat, five-part conclusion appears intentional and invites the question of whether other parts of the book have been carefully crafted as well.

If you pay close attention to the headings of the poems, you’ll notice that in five different places, Bible translators included the headings Book One through Book Five. The whole book of Psalms has been divided into five books or sections (Ps. 3-41; Ps. 42-72; Ps. 73-89; Ps. 90-106, and Ps. 107-145) (Bible Project).

James Johnston says that many people look at the Psalms like beads on a necklace – they are strung together, but they don’t have much to do with each other. The Psalms have been carefully put together and in a designed order for a purpose. So, the Psalms are more than a collection of poetry or songs just stuck in random order, but in the order to tell a story. They are a book (Johnston, 17).

When you consider reading the Psalms, many people consider them as stand-alone songs. They tend to think of them as songs in a playlist on their phone. Some people think of Psalms like the musical “*Oklahoma*” or “*The Phantom of the Opera*.” Each song is really good all by itself. It can stand alone as a song. However, when you put them all together, they tell a story like a musical. The Psalms are like a redemptive musical of how the King God promised to send His Son to save His people and bring them back into His Holy presence (Johnston).

The reason for these divisions is that each section has a final poem, which concludes with a similar line that looks like an editorial addition, “*May the Lord, the God of Israel, be blessed forever. Amen and Amen*” (Ps. 41:13; Ps. 72:19; Ps. 89:52, and 106:48). (Bible Project)

## 4. Chiastic Structure of the Psalms

- a. What is a chiasm or chiastic structure in literature? Think of chiastic structure working like a ring of concentric circles, with the center circle being the theological heart of the literary structure (Hamilton).

- b. How chiastic structure works:

A  
B  
C  
BB  
AA

- The first and the last elements “A-AA” correspond to one another, as do the second and the second-to-last “B-BB,” and the central element “C” is the theological heart of the literary structure (Hamilton).
- As a concentric circle model, “A-AA” would be in the outermost ring, “B-BB” would be in the second ring, and “C” would be the center of the ring. This would be the theological heart (Hamilton).

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- c. Chiasms accomplish a number of powerful effects: By establishing starting and end points, the form ensures that the development of thought comes full circle. The corresponding sections (second and second-to-last, third and third-to-last, etc.) likewise become mutually interpretive, and the interpreter who recognizes the structure can and should read these balancing sections in light of one another. In this way, chiasms become exegetically productive, showing the reader how the meaning of the whole communicates more than the sum of its individual parts. Similarly, authors often center their main idea (s) so that the chiastic structure functions to spotlight the particular contribution of the composition. (Hamilton, 53-54)
- d. Mary Douglas emphasizes the *“ring composition’s exegetical function... [because] it controls meaning, it restricts what is said, and in doing so it expands meaning along channels it has dug.”* Just as idioms and grammatical constructions inform our understanding of phrases and sentences, wider literary structures inform our understanding of longer units of text. Douglas says, *“You can compare the functions of ring composition to syntax: it tames wild words and firmly binds their meanings to its frame. Another function is to greatly deepen the range of reference by playing on the double meaning of words. Another of its benefits is that it is a form of play; it gives the pleasure of a game to the composer and the reader.”* (Hamilton, 54)
- e. The center of the chiasm is its theological heart. It makes three theological points for us:
  - First, the idea of a theological center gives an identifiable focus to the author’s intentions and is a tremendous aid to interpretation.” (54)
  - Second, when we view a text without knowledge of its chiastic structure, we often think the text is not ordered correctly. It seems it is in disarray. The fact is that it is not in disarray, but is highly structured, so that we not only understand the meaning of the text but also remember it. This leads to the third theological point.
  - Third, the mnemonic advantage may be the most compelling reason for the longevity of the chiasm and the universality of its use. ... The chiasm is self-tutoring, prodding the memory to fill in the elements of the form with balance pairs. ... The pattern conveys the cyclic orderliness of perceived reality. ... As the artist seeks a visual balance in composition, the chiasm obliges an oral world with an aural balance. So, in chiasm’s return to its point of departure, a resolution satisfies the ear’s anticipation, like music’s return to the opening key. Both individual psalms and groups of psalms have been carefully structured and chiastically arranged. (Hamilton, 54-55)
- f. The Overall Chiastic Structure of Book 1, Psalms 1-41 (Hamilton)
  - Psalms 1-2: Introduction to the Blessed Man, Yahweh’s Messiah.

Psalms 3-9: Absalom’s Revolt

Psalms 10-14: The Wicked

Psalms 15-24: The King

Psalms 25-33: God’s Word and Glory

Psalms 34-41: Saved through Judgment



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- g. Chiastic Structure of Book 1, Psalms 1-41

***Psalms 1-2:*** Introduction to the Blessed Man, Yahweh's Messiah

***Psalms 3-9***

Psalm 3: Absalom's Night of Opportunity

Psalm 4: David's Morning Prayer

Psalm 5: They are Wicked, Not I

Psalm 6: Don't Give Me What They Deserve

Psalm 7: Pleas of Innocence

Psalm 8: Begotten Son of Adam

Psalm 9: Absalom's Death

***Psalms 10-14***

Psalm 10: The Wicked Says in His Heart

Psalm 11: Yahweh in His Temple

Psalm 12: Yahweh's Pure Word

Psalm 13: How Long?

Psalm 14: The Fool Says in His Heart

***Psalms 15-24***

Psalm 15: Who Shall Ascend?

Psalm 16: Comfort

Psalm 17: Resurrection

Psalm 18: Deliverance for David and His Seed

Psalm 19: The Glory of God [In His Word]

Psalms 20-21: The King

Psalm 22: Death and Resurrection

Psalm 23: Comfort

Psalm 24: Who Shall Ascend?

***Psalms 25-33***

Psalm 25: Teaching

Psalm 26: Vindication

Psalm 27: Confidence

Psalm 28: Plea

Psalm 29: Glory

Psalm 30: Praise

Psalm 31: Refuge

Psalm 32: Forgiveness

Psalm 33: Word

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Psalm 34: Salvation

Psalm 35: Defend Me!

Psalm 36: Sin and Worship

Psalm 37: Blessed/Cut Off

Psalm 38: Save me!

Psalm 39: Wisdom

Psalm 40: Delivered

Psalm 41: Blessed

## h. Breakdown of Psalms 1-41 (Johnston)

*Psalms 1-2 are the introduction to the whole book of the Psalms.*

*Psalms 3-14 show the persecution and suffering of David in the past*

Psalms 3-7 are model prayers for depending on God and dependence on God's promises for future generations

Psalm 8 develops an analogy between David's victory and the reign of the Genesis 1 "son of man" over the "beast" of all humanity.

Psalms 9-14 follow this trajectory by broadening the portrait of the enemies. They become the wicked and the nations whom Yahweh then overcomes on the day he rises (Psalm 13)

*Psalms 15-24 Living by the Word of God in the Presence of God*

Psalm 15: The Temple: Living in God's presence by the Torah

Psalm 16: The King confesses confidence in God's power

Psalm 17: Prayer of Deliverance: Petition for deliverance in the middle of distress

Psalm 18: Royal Prayer: How God delivered the king from distress

Psalm 19: The Torah: The King confesses that the Torah keeps one pure

Psalms 20-21: Royal Prayers: Deliverance on behalf of the King

Psalm 22: Prayer of Deliverance: The King's prayer in mortal distress

Psalm 23: The King confesses confidence in God's compassion to deliver his King

Psalm 24: The Temple: Requirements for entering God's presence are integrity and righteousness by the Torah (vv. 3-6) and proclaiming God's kingship (vv. 7-10)

*Simplified chiastic structure of Psalms 15-24: Call to Covenant Faithfulness*

Psalm 15: The call to covenant faithfulness

Psalms 16-18: David's past deliverance and elevation as king

Psalm 19: The call to covenant faithfulness according to the Torah

Psalms 20-23: The future King's deliverance & elevation over the nations

Psalm 24: The call to covenant faithfulness

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*Psalms 25-41 contain three acrostic wisdom poems, each followed by poems of lament and deliverance.*

- Psalm 25 is an acrostic wisdom poem, followed by lament poems in Psalm 26-33
- Psalm 34 is an acrostic wisdom poem that is followed by poems of deliverance in Psalms 35-36
- Psalm 37 is an acrostic wisdom poem that is followed by poems of individual deliverance in Psalm 38-41.

*The Chiastic Structure of Books 1 through 5 of the Psalms (Hamilton)*

Book 1: Pss. 1-41: The Suffering of the Historical David

Book 2: Pss. 42-72: The Reign of the Historical David

Book 3: Pss. 73-89: The End of the Historical Davidic House

Book 4: Pss. 90-106: Moses Intercedes for the Davidic Covenant

Book 5: Pss. 107-150: The Conquest of the Future Davidic King

## IV. Biblical and Theological Themes and General Notes on the Psalms

1. The book of Psalms is one of the world's great treasures. The Psalms seek to draw us deep into him, high up, and further in. The old adage holds true for the Psalms: *"Songs make history, and history makes songs."*<sup>1</sup> The Psalms were forged in the history of God's people. God's mighty acts made his people sing, and those songs informed hearts, created expectations, and provided interpretive frameworks (Hamilton, 70).
2. Redemptive themes in Psalms:
  - a. How is Christ/the Gospel seen in a theophany, type, or redemptive theme?
  - b. How is the redemptive thread of the Bible seen in the Psalms?
  - c. God as King of all creation
  - d. Hope for the Messiah after exile
  - e. Lament as a response to evil
3. The Master Narrative of the Bible runs through the Psalms:

God created the world very good (Gen. 1:31). Man transgressed and incurred judgment (Gen. 2-3), but the words of Gen. 3:15 bring a promise of triumph over the one who tempted man to sin, and that promise hints that the judgments might be rolled back (cf. Gen. 3:17-19 with 5:29) and the world made new. This hope includes the reversal of death itself.

God made promises to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 that answer the judgments of Genesis 3:14-19 point for point, and the promises to Abraham were passed down and expanded upon through the rest of Genesis. Eventually, God made promises to David that show that the blessing of Abraham will be brought about through the future king from David's line (2 Sam. 7).

In addition to the growing collection of promises that develop and build upon one another, we have narratives of Israel's history, most particularly the exodus from Egypt, that have been interpreted and presented in light of the promises. The oppressive Egyptians are the seed of the serpent, and the promise in Genesis 3:15 that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head receives an anticipatory fulfillment at the Exodus. In this vein, Ps. 74:13-14 interprets the parting of the Red Sea as a crushing of the serpent's head receives an anticipatory fulfillment at the exodus.

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<sup>1</sup> This quote was in the *Wall Street Journal* and attributed to "Irving Berlin, on the coming of World War II."

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The exodus from Egypt points forward to a great defeat of the serpent and his seed through which God will liberate his people. The Sinai covenant likewise builds on previous covenants and anticipates a new covenant that will follow the new exodus. The pilgrimage through the wilderness to the land of promise also anticipates an even greater march on a better country, a new heaven and a new earth. Israel's prophets use Israel's past as the paradigm for predicting Israel's future. In the Master Narrative, we see the Characters, the Setting, and the Themes (Hamilton, 70-73).

## 4. The Characters in the Master Narrative:

*Yahweh:* Yahweh is the most important character not only in Psalms but also in the whole Bible. The Psalms rehearse history and celebrate his mighty deeds. The psalms that are prayers, petition Yahweh for help. Psalms of praise extol his goodness and greatness. Yahweh's character is communicated through his word, and his character ensures that his word will be kept. God's ultimate goal is the display of his character, and it is most clearly seen when his justice serves as the backdrop for the demonstration of his stunning mercy, which he accomplishes when he shows his glory in salvation through judgment (Hamilton, 73-74).

*The Messiah:* When Yahweh's world comes under attack, the Messiah becomes the Hero. Book 1, Psalm 1-2 shows us who the King or Messiah is. Psalm 72 prays for the fulfillment of God's promises concerning the Messiah. Psalm 89 rehearses the covenant with David concerning the seed of the woman that will reign. Psalm 110 is the most quoted Psalm in the New Testament. In it, David recounts how his Lord was invited to sit at Yahweh's right hand and be installed as the Melchizedekian high priest (Hamilton, 73-74).

*The People of the Messiah:* The people of the Messiah are the ones who have experienced the covenant love of God. They know His loving kindness. These are the saints and faithful ones of God (Hamilton, 73-74).

*The Enemies of God:* Those who are Yahweh's enemies don't take God as their King. They don't believe what Yahweh has spoken. They don't love God. They don't accept or live by Yahweh's revealed instructions for life (Hamilton, 73-74).

## 5. The Setting of the Master Narrative:

One of the most significant things to say about the setting of the Psalms is that it presents creation as a cosmic temple. This is why the temple is compared to the heavens and the earth. For example, when it says the heavens *are spread out like a tent*, it reflects the imagery of the temple. So, David can describe the upheaval of creation at the flood before saying that everything in Yahweh's temple cries, "glory!" Hamilton says: "*If the setting is a cosmic temple, the human characters are the visible image and likeness of the invisible God, placed in the cosmic temple to make manifest God's own character, presence, and reign. In a significant sense, Adam was God's son, and the messiah comes as a new Adam.*" (Hamilton, 75)

## 6. The Themes of the Master Narrative:

Hamilton says that there are a lot of themes in the Psalms but he identifies three broad ones that run throughout the whole of the Psalms: 1) God's word and the promises in it; 2) The suffering righteous servant; and 3) The sudden destruction of the seemingly powerful wicked.

- a. *God's word and the promises in it:* God's word is life-giving and promises blessing and success to those who meditate on it constantly (Ps 1:2-3), affirming its pure truth (Ps 12:6), and asserting that by it God made the world. God's word has life-giving, wisdom-imparting, enlightening, and lasting power (Ps 19:7-9). God's word teaches people how to think rightly about God's world. God's word also makes promises about how and what God will do to redeem, cleanse, and renew

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his world, and with these promises come instructions on how to please God. God's promise to redeem centers on God's promise to the king from David's line, and the Psalter's strategic arrangement puts the spotlight on the reliability of God's creative word, guaranteeing the reliability of his promise to redeem. (Hamilton, 76)

- b. *The Righteous Sufferer*: Psalm 2 speaks of those who rage about the Lord's anointed, and then Psalm 3 begins to illustrate that raging. Not only that, but David again and again speaks of the difficulty he faced from his Israelite kinsmen, including Cush, Saul, the Zephites, and the unnamed traitor. The righteous sufferer often complains that his enemies hate him without cause. He means that he had not wronged them, and yet they hated him without cause. Their hatred of him seemed to arise from their own selfish ambition, as did Saul's and Absalom's (Hamilton, 76).

Hamilton argues that David interpreted his own experience in light of earlier Scripture. He identifies with the likes of Abel, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses, and he identifies his enemies with their enemies. David also seems to have understood the conflict as Genesis 3:15 enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, and he seems to have expected that the king who would arise from his line would also experience that enmity, culmination in the king from his line, in whose experience the whole pattern would come to culmination. The future king would be righteous; he would suffer at the hands of enemies unjustly opposing him, and his ultimate triumph would be as dramatic as the death and resurrection reversal poetically described in Ps 22. (Hamilton, 76-77)

Hamilton contends that the authors of earlier Scripture intended their audience to see the enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, and further that they wanted to encourage God's people to stand fast as the seed of the woman against the seed of the serpent. For David to see the outworking of the pattern in his own life, then, was in keeping with the intent of earlier biblical authors, and likewise for later king—including the man from Nazareth—to identify with David's experience, even to see David's experience fulfilled in his own, would be fully in line with David's intent. (Hamilton, 77)

- c. *The Sudden Destruction of the Seemingly Powerful Wicked*: The enemies (the seed of the serpent) seem more numerous and, in worldly terms, more powerful and impressive than the seed of the woman. Psalm 73 describes the way they enjoy long lives of indulgence. The Psalms, however, speak to the way that though they have the power to dig pits, they will fall into them, all of their sin will rebound onto their own heads, and suddenly they will be like chaff before the wind, destroyed in the way by the wrath of the king to come. (Hamilton, 77)

## 7. Truths Derived from the Master Narrative:

Life will triumph over death. Good will overcome evil. The defiled will be cleansed, the broken mended, the wicked judged, the faithful rewarded, and God's creation purposes will be accomplished. Although the Davidic king may be dethroned (Psalm 89), ultimately God will keep His promises to David (2 Samuel 7; Psalm 110). There are two overarching divine truths to conclude from the Master Narrative: Divine Simplicity and the Fear of God.

*Divine Simplicity*: The idea that God is simple has profound explanatory power for understanding the Psalms. The psalmists see no conflict between Yahweh's love and justice because both are simply the application of his character. He shows steadfast love by keeping his promises to forgive the repentant (Pss 32, 51) and judge their unrepentant oppressors (Ps 82).

*The Fear of God*: The most important thing that can happen to anyone who studies the Psalms is precisely that they encounter God. The reality that God should be feared cannot be limited to the occurrences of

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the word. The terrifying majesty of the living God pervades the Psalms and the Old Testament. The undergirding assumption that informs the fear of God is God himself in all his tremendous majesty. His is not an unpredictable terror like the so-called gods, but he is altogether holy and pure in his justice. He has graciously revealed Himself in His Word, and those who value their lives recognize their need for that Word. Those who disregard God care little for His Word. They are fools.

## 8. Doctrinal and Theological Themes in the Psalms:

- a. Major themes in the Psalms: Psalms 1-2 are the introduction to the Psalms and lay out the major themes of the book. Psalm 1 tells of the ideal man who loves the Torah. He is like a tree planted by streams that nourish his life. Then, Psalm 2 tells us who his ideal man is. He is the King. He is the promised Messiah from Genesis 3 who will come and kill the serpent and bring justice on human evil by restoring God's Kingdom.

Poems of Lament and Praise are major themes in the Book of Psalms. There's one thing about the book of Psalms that's easy to miss if you don't read it in order. While there are many different types of poems in the book, they can all be sorted into two larger categories of either lament or praise. Poems of lament express the poets' pain, confusion, and anger surrounding the horrible things happening around them or to them. They draw attention to what's wrong in the world and ask God to do something about it. There are a lot of these lament poems in the book, which shows that this is an appropriate response to the evil and tragedy we see in the world. Lamentation plays an important role in our journey of prayer.

While these lament poems make up much of Books One through Three, you can see that praise poems are occasionally woven in as well. These are poems of joy and celebration that draw attention to what's good in the world. They retell stories of what God has done in the lives of his people, and they thank him for it. In Books Four and Five, praise poems outnumber the laments, culminating in the five-part hallelujah conclusion.

This shift from lament to praise is profound, revealing something about the nature of prayer according to this new Torah. Hoping for the messianic kingdom creates tension as we see the tragic state of our world. The Psalms teach us to neither ignore our pain nor let it determine the meaning of our lives. Biblical faith and prayer are always forward-looking, anticipating the day when God will fulfill his promises and praising him for this ahead of time. The Torah and messiah, lament and praise, faith and hope, this is what the book of Psalms is all about.

- b. The New Testament use of the Psalms: The Psalms are a book about Jesus. Jesus said the Psalms prophesied about him. He said in Luke 24:44, *"Everything written about me is the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."* Luke's grammar actually suggests that the apostles and early church counted the Psalms as part of the Prophets. In fact, when Peter preached at Pentecost, he argued that David was indeed a prophet (Acts 2:30) (Johnston, 17).

Psalms 1 & 2 are an introduction to the Psalms. Psalm 1 introduces us to the theme of the ideal man who loves God's word and lives by it. Psalm 2 identifies the ideal man as the King whom God sets on the throne. The word anointed in Psalm 2 is the word Messiah in the Greek. Psalm 2 is talking about Christ (Johnston, 17).

- c. The Messianic Hope found in the Psalms:

*The Anointed King:* The figure of the king is found as early as Psalm 2. The king was more than just a leader. He was the nation's mediator between heaven and earth. There are divine references to the king found in Psalm 2, Psalm 110, and Psalm 45, yet the failure of these human

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kings raises men's eyes to One who will come and fulfill the kingship so that the king becomes the Messiah.

*"My Son" language of the Psalms:* The "My Son" language of Psalm 2:7 is a verse that is quoted much in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, Israel was called God's son and His firstborn (Ex. 4:22). Later, the promise made to David was that his heir would sit on his throne, and God would be his father, and he would be his son. We need to understand that the text was not referring to a mere son but One who would sit at God's right hand, exalted even above David (Ps 110). Kidner says: "The New Testament, revealing God's only-begotten Son as co-eternal with the Father, refers the 'today' of Psalm 2:7 to the incarnate Son's resurrection, when, like a king at his crowning, he was 'designated Son of God in power.' (Rom. 1:4; cf. Acts 13:33).

*"God":* Ps 45:6, *"Your throne, O God, is forever and ever."* is probably the boldest Messianic oracle in the Psalms. Hebrews 1:8 confirms that it is speaking about Christ. There are two other Messianic references found in the Psalms in Hebrews 1. The comment in Hebrews 1:6 implies that when God manifests Himself on the earth, He does so in the person of the Son (34-35).

*"Servant":* King David used this term or title to describe himself when he was in distress. While it is not a common title, it does point us to the innocent suffering of the Messiah (Kidner, 32-39).

- d. Messianic prophecies in the Psalms (Lawson, 55-56):

Prophecy	Psalms	Fulfillment
Christ will be betrayed by a friend	41:9	John 13:18
Christ's throne will be eternal	45:6-7	Heb. 1:8-9
Christ will ascend to heaven	68:18	Eph. 4:8
Christ will be hated without cause	69:4	John 15:25
Zeal for God's Temple will consume Christ	69:9	John 2:17
Christ will be given vinegar and gall	69:21	Matt. 27:34; John 19:28-30
Christ's betrayer will be desolate	69:25	Acts 1:20
Christ will speak in parables	78:2	Matt. 13:35
Christ will be worshiped by angels	97:7	Heb. 1:6
Christ is the Creator of all	102:25-27	Heb. 1:10-12
Christ's betrayer will be replaced by another	109:8	Acts 1:20
Christ's enemies will bow down to Him	110:1	Matt. 22:44; Mk. 12:36; Lk. 20:42-43; 22:69; Acts 2:34-35; Heb. 1:3
Christ will be a priest like Melchizedek	110:4	Heb. 5:6; 6:20; 7:17
Christ will be the chief cornerstone	118:22-23	Matt. 21:42; Acts 4:11
Christ will come in the name of the Lord	118:25-26	Matt. 21:9
Christ will assume David's throne	132:11	Acts 2:30

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God will announce Christ to be His Son	2:7	Matt. 3:17; Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5
Christ will be praised by children	8:2	Matt. 21:16
All things will be put under Christ's feet	8:6	Mk. 12:36; 1 Cor. 15:27; Eph. 1:22; Heb. 2:8
Christ will be resurrected from the grave	16:8-11	Mk. 16:6-7; Acts 2:25-28; 13:35
God will forsake Christ in His moment of agony	22:1	Matt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34
Christ will be scorned and ridiculed	22:7, 8	Matt. 27:39-43; Lk. 23:35
Christ's hands and feet will be pierced	22:16	John 20:25, 27; Acts 2:23
Others will gamble for Christ's clothes	22:18	Matt. 27:35-36
Christ will have many spiritual brothers	22:22	Acts 4:11; Heb. 2:12
Christ will commit His Spirit to the Father	31:5	Luke 23:46
Not one of Christ's bones will be broken	34:20	John 19:32-33, 36
Christ will be hated unjustly	35:19	John 15:25
Christ will come to do God's will	40:7-8	Heb. 10:7

e. The Psalms Proclaim the Attributes of God (Lawson, 47-51):

The Psalms proclaim a wide array of God's attributes, which are divine perfections of His character and essence that distinguish Him as God. The attributes of God: *How they saw God determined how they saw themselves in their pulpits (Lawson quoting R. Bickel, 47).*

- **Eternal:** He is the self-existent One. He has no beginning and no end. He is the uncreated Creator of the universe (Ps 90:2; 102:25-27; 106:48).
- **Goodness:** God's moral character is such that He is marked by steadfast love and kindness toward His people (Ps 23:6; 25:8; 31:19; 33:5; 34:8; 52:1; 65:4; 68:10; 86:5; 104:24; 107:8; 119:68; 145:9).
- **Gracious:** God's dealing with sinful mankind is not based on what man deserves but in terms of God's generosity (Ps 116:5).
- **Holy:** God's character is morally perfect and completely separated from sin. He is blameless and without flaws (Ps 22:3; 30:4; 47:8; 48:1; 60:6; 68:17; 89:35; 93:5; 99:3; 5, 9; 145:17).
- **Immutable:** God is unchanging in His being, attributes, purposes, and promises (Ps 102:26, 27).
- **Just:** God always acts in accordance with what is right. He perfectly administers justice and equity. He punishes the wicked and rewards the righteous. (Ps 51:4; 89:14; 98:9; 99:3-4).
- **Lovingkindness:** When God considers man's condition, He is moved to unconditional love toward him (Ps 17:7; 23:6; 25:6; 26:3; 31:21; 36:7, 10; 40:10, 11; 42:8; 48:9; 63:3; 89:33, 49; 92:2; 103:4; 107:43; 117:2; 119:76, 88, 149; 138:2; 143:8).
- **Long-suffering:** God is slow to anger and patient towards His people. He abounds in lovingkindness (Ps 86:15; 78:38).
- **Merciful:** God is compassionate toward His people. He is tender-hearted (Ps 145:8-9; 6:2-4; 25:6; 31:7; 32:5; 36:5; 51:1; 52:8; 62:12; 86:5, 15; 89:28; 103:4, 8, 11, 17; 106:1; 107:1; 115:1; 118:1-4; 119:64; 130:7; 147:11).



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- *Omnipresent*: God is everywhere present with His whole being (Ps 139:7)
  - *Omniscient*: God is all-knowing of everything and everything possible (Ps 139:1-4; 44:21; 139:12, 142:3; 147:5)
  - *Omnipotent*: God is all-powerful and able to accomplish all things according to His infinite power. Nothing is impossible for God, who can carry out His good pleasure completely (Ps 21:13; 29:4-5; 37:17; 62:11; 63:1-2; 65:6; 66:7; 68:33, 35; 79:11-16; 89:8, 13; 106:8; 136:12).
  - *Righteous*: God is the perfect standard by which all things and all people are measured (Ps 5:8; 7:9, 17; 11:7; 19:9; 22:31; 31:1; 35:24, 28; 36:6, 10; 40:10; 48:10; 50:6; 51:14; 69:27; 71:2, 15, 16, 19, 24; 73:12-17; 85:10; 96:13; 97:2, 6; 98:2, 9; 103:17; 111:3; 116:5; 119:7, 40, 62, 123, 137, 138, 142, 144, 172; 143:1, 11; 145:7, 17).
  - *Sovereign*: God possesses and exercises all authority over everything that He has created (Ps 103:19; 2:4-5; 47:2, 8; 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1; 115:3; 135:6)
  - *Truth*: God is unwavering in His truthfulness as He always represents things as they actually are (Ps 25:10; 31:5; 33:4; 57:3, 10; 71:22; 85:10; 86:15; 89:14, 49; 96:13; 98:3; 100:5; 119:160; 139:2; 146:6)
  - *Wise*: God is all-wise and always acts with full knowledge of the best path in order to pursue the highest end (Ps 104:24; 136:5)
  - *Wrathful*: God intensely hates all evil and inflicts perfect vengeance on the wicked who violate His word. His wrath is demonstrated in eternal judgment and divine punishment (Ps 2:12; 6:1; 7:11-12; 21:8-9; 30:5; 38:1; 39:10; 58:10-11; 74:1-2; 76:6-7; 78:21-22, 49-51, 58-59; 79:5; 80:4; 89:30-32; 90:7-9, 11; 99:8; 102:9-10)
- f. Proclaiming God's Names in the Psalms (Lawson, 51-52)
- *Elohim (God)*: This title is a general term for deity and comes from the root word that means strong.
  - *Elyon (Most High God)*: This emphasizes God's sovereignty and supremacy over all of creation and people.
  - *El Olam (The Everlasting God)*: This title originates from the original Hebrew, which translates to *The God of Eternity*.
  - *Yahweh (related to the Hebrew word for 'to be')*: This name for God means He is the active, self-existent One. This is also God's covenant name.
  - *Adonai (Lord)*: In the plural, it means *majesty*. In the singular, it means *lord, master, or owner*.
- g. Proclaiming God's Images in the Psalms
- *Shield*: This often depicts God as the One who protects His people from harm from their enemies and dangers.
  - *King*: God is the King who sovereignly rules.
  - *Judge*: God is the righteous judge who presides in judgment over every human life.
  - *Rock*: God is the believer's sure and impregnable defence, unshakable, solid protection.
  - *Shepherd*: God gives gentle guidance and heroic protection to His people.
  - *Fortress*: God is the believer's high place of protection from all harm
  - *Refuge*: God is the believer's shelter from danger, and a hiding place of rest.
  - *Horn*: The horns of an animal symbolized strength. Later, they symbolized human rulers as those pictures of the forceful strength of God's rulership.
- h. Technical Terms Used in the Psalms
- Interjections (Kinder, 51):

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- *Selah*: This occurs 71 times and predominantly in Books 1-3. It is probably a signal for an interlude or a change in musical accompaniment. It could also mean to strike up the instruments or voices. Another possible meaning is to bow down.
- *Higgaion*: In Psalm 9:16, it follows *Selah* as a detached note. It most likely means *meditation* or *to quiet the music*.

## Classifications (Kidner 52-53):

- *Psalms (mizmor) and Song (sir)*: These are not entirely distinguishable for us, but the former probably implied by its name that it was sung to an instrumental accompaniment.
- *Miktam* (Pss 16, 56-60): This is an obscure title for these psalms. These psalms seem to be concerned with insecurity rather than sin. Eerdmans suggests that *miktam* should be translated as “*silent prayer*.”
- *Maskil*: Thirteen psalms are *maskils*. They are mostly in Books 2 & 3.
- *A Prayer (five psalms) or Praise (Ps 145)*: The plurals of these could serve as titles for the entire collections of the psalms.

## Liturgical Notes (Kidner, 53-58):

- “*To the Choirmaster*”: This is a note attached to fifty-five psalms and also to the psalm in Habakkuk (Hab. 3:19b).
- “*According to The Sheminith*” (Pss 6 & 12): Sheminith means eighth, but it is unclear what eighty it is referring to.
- “*According to the Gittith*” (Pss 8, 81, 84): The three main conjectures of this title is that it is a term connected with the vintage (which coincided with the Feast of Tabernacles) or with the Ark’s journey from Gittite’s house to Jerusalem or with an instrument from Gath.
- “*According to Muth-labben*” (Ps 9): No certainty what it means.
- “*According to The Hind of Dawn*” (Ps 22): It seems this title draws attention to the deliverance which will light up the final verses of the psalm.
- “*According to Lilies*” (Pss 45, 69)
- “*According to Shusham Eduth*” (Ps 60)
- “*According to Lilies. A Testimony*” (Ps 80)
- “*According to Mahalath*” (Pss 53, 88): This could be the name of a tune or an instrument.
- “*According to The Dove on Far-off Terebinths*” (Ps 56): This could be the name of a tune.
- “*According to Do Not Destroy*” (Pss 57-59, 75): This refers to a tune.
- “*A Song of Ascents*” (Pss 120-134): Most likely, this referred to the title of the pilgrimage up to Jerusalem, or the processional ascent of the “hill of the Lord.”

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