

“Blessed is the Man...”

A Study of the Psalms



INTRODUCTION

I. Name

- A. English: Psalms, from the Greek *psalmos* = Hebrew *mizmor*: a song sung to the accompaniment of string instruments
- B. Hebrew: *tehillim* = praises

II. Numerology

A. Number of Psalms

- 1. Hebrew Bible: 150
- 2. Greek version (called the Septuagint, abbreviated as LXX) has an additional psalm at the end of the book. Attributed to David, the oldest text is Greek, though a Hebrew version dating to the first century AD was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls:

B. Versification: In the Hebrew text, Luther's translation, and many other languages, the superscriptions are counted as verse 1, in English, they are not.

- 1. 116 of the psalms have superscriptions in the Hebrew text (LXX supplies superscriptions to all but Psalms 1 & 2).¹
- 2. Superscriptions range from a single word (see Psalm 25: "of David") to quite lengthy (see Psalms 18; 60). Contain five types of information:
 - a. Authorship
 - b. Historical circumstances: Thirteen psalms belong in this category, all of them refer to David's life and experience.²
 - c. Literary features: *maskil*, *miktam*, *shiggaion*. Various ideas of what these mean.
 - d. Liturgical use: Psalm 92 (for the Sabbath), others are nonspecific ("to bring to remembrance," "a psalm of thanksgiving," "at the dedication of the house," "of ascents").



¹ The 34 psalms with no superscription: 1, 2, 10, 33, 43, 71, 91, 93–97, 104–107, 111–119, 135–137, 146–150.

² David's conflict with King Saul: Psalms 7, 34, 52, 56, 57, 59, 142; culmination of his reign: Psalm 18; the Syro-Ammonite war: Psalm 60; repentance after his adultery with Bathsheba: Psalm 51; flight from Absalom: Psalms 3, 63.

- e. Musical information (notation/instrumentation):
 - i. “to the chief musician” affixed to 35 psalms
 - ii. Cryptic terms and phrases that suggest musical setting or the manner of singing.

C. Numeration

Hebrew/English	LXX/Vulgate
1–8	1–8
9–10	9
11–113	10–112
114–115	113
116:1–9	114
116:10–19	115
117–146	116–145
147:1–11	146
147:12–20	147
148–150	148–150

III. The Use of the Psalter

A. Use of the Psalms in the New Testament: cited 126 times

1. Use by Jesus
 - a. Speaking of Him as the Messiah
 - i. Ps 78:2 in Matt 13:35 about the purpose of parables
 - ii. Ps 8:2 in Matt 21:15–16 about Jesus as the recipient of the children’s praise
 - iii. Ps 118:22–23 in Matt 21:42 about Jesus as the foundation stone of the new temple
 - iv. Ps 110:1 in Matt 22:41–45 about the Messiah as David’s Lord and in Matt 26:64 about His exaltation
 - v. Ps 35:19/69:4 in John 15:25 about the world’s hatred of Him
 - b. Use by Jesus in prayer at His passion
 - i. Psalms 115–118 (?) after the Last Supper in Matt 26:30.
 - ii. Ps 22:1 in Matt 27:46/Mark 15:34 in His abandonment by God
 - iii. Ps 42:2 or 63:1 in John 19:28 in His thirst for God’s presence

- iv. Ps 31:5 in Luke 23:46 in His self-commendation to His Father
- c. Use by Jesus to preach Himself and His fulfilment of them by His death and resurrection (Luke 24:44–47).
- 2. The apostles
 - a. In their preaching of Jesus (eg. Peter’s use of Ps 16 in Acts 2:25–31, Ps 110:1 in Acts 2:34 and Ps 118:22 in 1 Pet 2:7).
 - b. Identification of Jesus as the speaker in them.
 - i. Ps 18 in Rom 15:9
 - ii. The writer to the Hebrews identifies Jesus with the royal singer in Ps 22:22 who led the church in its singing of thanksgiving and praise to God the Father (Heb 2:11; see also Rom 1:8; 7:25; 16:27; Col 3:16–17; Heb 13:15; 1 Pet 4:11).
 - iii. Ps 40 in Heb 10:5–7
- B. Use of the Psalms in the Christian Church
 - 1. Liturgical
 - a. Use in Christian worship as in temple and synagogue (Acts 4:24–30; Col 3:16)
 - b. Use in Early Church: “The Scriptures are read, the psalms are sung, sermons are delivered, and petitions are offered” (Tertullian, *On the Soul* 9.4 [ca. AD 200]).
 - c. Use in the Services today: great recovery of the use and singing of the psalms in the liturgy in 2nd half of 20th century
 - i. 10 citations or occasions of use in the Divine Service
 - Introit
 - Gradual
 - Alleluia Verse/Tract (in Lent)
 - Offertory – an ordinary in Lutheran usage
 - Communio – dropped from Lutheran usage
 - ii. 13 citations or occasions of use in Matins, 8 in Vespers, 6 in Compline
 - d. Paraphrase and use in hymnody: 60–70 hymns in *LSB* based on psalms

2. Devotional

a. Communal

- i. early custom of praying the entire Psalter each week, the 8 monastic hours built around this. The Rule of St. Benedict (ca. 530) lays out the daily assignments for each hour:

- **Vigils** (middle of the night) consisted of Psalms 3 and 95, followed by a selection of twelve psalms according to the day of the week.
- **Lauds** (dawn) always began with Psalms 67 and 51, and continued with the following selection, day by day: on Sunday, Psalms 118 and 63; on Monday, Psalms 5 and 36; on Tuesday, Psalms 43 and 57; on Wednesday, Psalms 64 and 65; on Thursday, Psalms 88 and 90; on Friday, Psalms 76 and 92; and on Saturday, Psalm 143 and, instead of another psalm, Deut. 32:1–43. Lauds was then completed each day by Psalms 148, 149, and 150.
- **Prime** (before beginning of work) on Sunday used the first four sections of Psalm 119 and on Monday through Saturday used three psalms each day: on Monday, Psalms 1, 2, and 6; on Tuesday, Psalms 7–9; on Wednesday, Psalms 10–12; on Thursday, Psalms 13–15; on Friday, Psalms 16, 17, and the first half of 18; on Saturday, the second half of Psalm 18 and Psalms 19 and 20.
- **Terce** (9:00 am), **Sext** (Noon), and **None** (3:00 pm) on Sunday used three successive sections of Psalm 119—vv. 33–56 for Terce, vv. 57–80 for Sext, and vv. 81–104 for None. Monday completed the recitation of Psalm 119: vv. 105–128 for Terce, vv. 129–152 for Sext, and vv. 153–176 for None. Tuesday through Saturday, Terce used Psalms 120–122, Sext used Psalms 123–125, and None used Psalms 126–128.
- **Vespers** (at end of the workday) used four psalms each day in a sequence from Psalm 110 to Psalm 147, deleting Psalms 118–128, 134, and 143, dividing each of the long psalms 139, 144, and 145 into two readings,



and combining Ps. 116:10–19 (a single psalm by the reckoning of the Vulgate) and Psalm 117 into a single reading. That is, for Vespers on Sunday one read Psalms 110–113; on Monday, Psalms 114–115 (a single psalm by the reckoning of the Vulgate), 116:1–9 (a full psalm by the reckoning of the Vulgate), 116:10–19 plus 117, and 129; on Tuesday Psalms 130–133; on Wednesday, Psalms 135–138; on Thursday, the two halves of Psalm 139 and Psalms 140 and 141; on Friday, Psalm 142, the two halves of Psalm 144, and the first half of Psalm 145; and on Saturday, the second half of Psalm 145, Psalm 146, and the two halves of Psalm 147 (two psalms by the reckoning of the Vulgate).

- **Compline** (sunset) consisted every day of Psalms 4, 91, and 134.
- ii. Old Lutheran practice of working sequentially through the psalms: Ps 1–109 at Matins, Ps 110–150 at Vespers. Luther’s musical collaborator, Georg Rhau, provided musical settings for the following psalms:
 - Sunday Ps 110–114
 - Monday: Ps 116–117, 120–121
 - Tuesday: Ps 122–126
 - Wednesday: Ps 127–131
 - Thursday: Ps. 132–133, 135–137
 - Friday: Ps. 138–142
 - Saturday: Ps 144–147
 - iii. monthly praying of the Psalter in the Anglican tradition, carried over into *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941).

b. Personal

3. Pastoral

IV. David and the Psalms

A. Ascription to David

1. Jewish Tradition

- a. Ascription to David: David as the ‘father’ of psalmody in Israel
- b. Composition by 10 persons: Adam, Melchizedek, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Heman, Jeduthun, Asaph, the sons of Korah

2. New Testament on David as the “speaker” in the Psalms

a. Jesus

- i. Ps 110 (Matt 22:43, 45)
- ii. The Book of Psalms (Luke 20:42)?

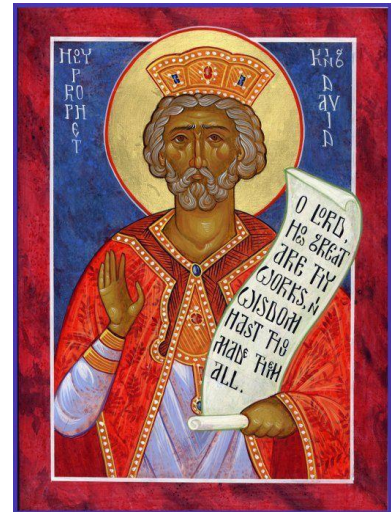
b. Apostles

- i. Ps 2 (Acts 4:25–26)
- ii. Ps 16 (Acts 2:25–31)
- iii. Ps 32 (Rom 4:6–8)
- iv. Ps 69 (Acts 1:16; Rom 11:9–10)
- v. Ps 95 (Heb 4:7)
- vi. Ps 109:8 (Acts 1:16)

c. Connection of the Psalms with David in the Old Testament

i. 1–2 Samuel

- David the lyre player (1 Sam 16:14–23; 19:9)
- David as the inspired ‘singer of Israel’s songs’ (2 Sam 23:1; cf. 2 Sam 1:17–27; 6:5)
- David’s use of Ps 18 to celebrate his victory over his enemies (2 Sam 22:1–51)



ii. Chronicles and Nehemiah

- David's institution of the temple choir for petition, thanksgiving and praise (1 Chr 6:31–32; 16:4–42; 23:5, 30–31; 25:1–31; 2 Chr 7:6; 8:14; 23:18–19; 29:25; 35:15; Neh 12:36, 45–46)
- Hezekiah's authorization of the psalms of David and Asaph (2 Chr 29:30)
- David's continued performance of the Lord's song by means of the temple choir even after his death in 2 Chr 7:6: 'the Levites also (stood at their posts), with the instruments for the Lord's song that David had made for giving thanks to the Lord - whose loving kindness is forever – in David's performance of praise through their hands.'

iii. Psalms

- The use of the Davidic ascription: *ledavid* 73 Hebrew psalms (87 psalms in the Septuagint)
- References to incidents in the life of David in their titles (Ps 3; 7; 18; 34; 51; 52; 54; 56; 57; 59; 60; 63; 142)
- Reference in Psalm 72:20 to Psalms 3–72 as 'the prayers of David'

B. Modern Challenges to the Davidic Authorship of the Psalms

1. Anachronistic references to the temple before its existence (Ps 5:7; 11:4; 18:6; 20:2; 23:6; 24:3; 27:4; 29:9; 36:8; 52:8; 60:6; 61:4; 63:2; 65:4; 66:13; 68:24,29,35; 69:9)
2. References to David in the third person (eg. Ps 18:50)
3. The increase in the number of Davidic ascriptions in the titles to the psalms from MT (73) to LXX (87)
4. The supposed historical unreliability of Chronicles which tells of David's institution of psalm singing in Jerusalem
5. Linguistic data as evidence for the late origin of the Psalter
6. Compilation of the Psalter in the post-exilic period

C. Sense of the Ascription of Psalms to David

1. Meaning of preposition *le*
 - a. By David: authorship or authorization

- b. About David: content
 - c. Belonging to David: his property
 - d. For David: for ritual use by him or on his behalf
- 2. Meaning of “David”
 - a. Proper name: David, son of Jesse
 - b. Title: king in the line of David
 - i. Davidic monarch (eg. Hosea 3:5; Jer 30:9)
 - ii. Messianic king (eg. Ezek 34:23, 24; 37:24, 25)
- 3. Possible interpretations
 - a. Composed by David
 - b. Dealing with David, or the Davidic king, or the Messianic king
 - c. Performance for David and his successors as kings
 - d. For use by David, or by the Davidic king, or by the Messianic king
 - e. For use by the Davidic choir on behalf of the king in the royally instituted choral service at the temple in Jerusalem

V. Classification of the Psalms

A. Biblical Types

- 1. *Mizmor* “song [accompanied by a stringed instrument]”: 57 psalms
- 2. *Shir* “song”: 30 psalms, joined with *mizmor* about a dozen times (see Ps 65, 66, 68). *Shir Hammaloth* “song of ascents”: 120–134
- 3. *Tefillah* “prayer”: 5 (17, 86, 90, 102, 142)
- 4. Uncertain
 - a. *Miktam* (16, 56–60): “a choice piece,” Septuagint renders as *stelographia*, “memorial prayer”
 - b. *Maskil*: 13 psalms (42–45): psalms for teaching or meditation, a skillful psalm

- B. Septuagint: assigns psalms for each day of the week: Ps 24 for Sunday, 48 for Monday, 94 for Wednesday, 93 for Friday. Later tradition added 82 for Tuesday and 81 for Thursday.

Rabbinic commentary on daily psalms:

The following was the order of the Psalms in the daily service of the temple. On the first day of the week they sang Psalm 24, "The earth is the Lord's," etc., in commemoration of the first day of creation... On the second day they sang Psalm 48, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised," etc., because on the second day of creation "the Lord divided His works, and reigned over them." On the third day they sang Psalm 82, "God stands in the congregation of the mighty," etc., "because on that day the earth appeared, on which are the Judge and the judged." On the fourth day Psalm 94 was sung, "O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongs," etc., "because on the fourth day God made the sun, moon, and stars, and will be avenged on those that worship them." On the fifth day they sang Psalm 81, "Sing aloud unto God our strength," etc., "because of the variety of creatures made that day to praise His name." On the sixth day Psalm 93 was sung, "The Lord reigns," etc., "because on that day God finished His works and made man, and the Lord ruled over all His works." Lastly, on the Sabbath day they sang Psalm 92, "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord," etc., "because the Sabbath was symbolical of the millennial kingdom at the end of the six thousand years" dispensation, when the Lord would reign over all, and His glory and service fill the earth with thanksgiving.³

- C. Luther's classifications, based on theme or content: messianic, teaching, comfort, prayer/petition, thanksgiving

Luther on the Psalms:

Every Christian ought to know the Psalms as well as he knows his five fingers. Then the four evangelists will also be understood properly.

What is the Psalter but prayer and praise to God, that is, a book of hymns? ...In this book the dear Holy Spirit supplies us with words and thoughts for our prayers and petitions to our heavenly Father.

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 beautifully and briefly everything that is in the entire Bible. It is really a fine enchiridion or handbook. In fact, I have a notion that the Holy Spirit wanted to take the trouble himself to compile a short Bible and book of examples of all Christendom or all saints, so that anyone who could not read the whole Bible would here have anyway almost an entire summary of it, comprised in one little book.

Where does one find finer words of joy than in the psalms of praise and thanksgiving? There you look into the hearts of all the saints, as into fair and pleasant

³ Mishnah, *Tamid* 7, cited with commentary by Edersheim, *The Temple*, 172, 173.

gardens, yes, as into heaven itself. There you see what fine and pleasant flowers of the heart spring up from all sorts of faith and happy thoughts toward God, because of his blessings. On the other hand, where do you find deeper, more sorrowful, more pitiful words of sadness than in the psalms of lamentation? There again you look into the hearts of all the saints, as into death, yes, as into hell itself. How gloomy and dark it is there, with all kinds of troubled forebodings about the wrath of God! So, too, when they speak of fear and hope, they use such words that no painter could so depict for you fear or hope, and no Cicero or other orator so portray them.

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 or find or wish for anything better. In a word, if you would see the holy Christian Church painted in living color and shape, comprehended in one little picture, then take up the Psalter.

D. Since the late 19th/early 20th centuries, scholars have attempted to classify the psalms according to their forms or genres. The following are the standard genres:

1. Individual laments

- a. Individual laments: 6; 13; 22; 35; 39; 42–43; 77; 88; 102
- b. Individual petitions: 3; 4(?); 5; 7; 14 = 53(?); 17; 25; 26; 27; 28; 31; 36; 38; 40; 41(?); 51; 54; 55; 56; 57; 58; 59; 61; 64; 69; 70; 71; 83; 86; 109; 130; 138(?); 139; 140; 141; 142; 143

2. Communal or national laments

- a. Communal laments: 9–10; 44; 60; 74; 77; 79; 80; 85; 89 (royal); 90; 108
- b. Communal petitions: 12; 67; 83; 94; 123; 125; 126; 129; 137; 144

3. Psalms of Trust

- a. Individual: 4; 11; 16; 23; 27, 62; 63; 73, 91, 121(?)
- b. Communal: 115, 123, 124, 125, 126

4. Thanksgiving

- a. Individual thanksgiving: 9(?); 18 (royal); 30; 31 (?); 32(?); 34(?); 40:1–10; 41; 92; 116; 118; 120; 138(?)
- b. Communal thanksgiving: 65(?); 66(?); 100(?); 107(?); 118; 124; 129



Hermann Gunkel (1862 – 1932): the father of form criticism (study of the genre of biblical texts to determine their origin). Positive contribution: focus on the study of each psalm as a whole rather than isolated verses.

5. Hymns of Praise

- a. General: 8; 19; 29; 33; 65; 66; 67(?); 68; 96; 98; 100; 103; 104; 105; 111(?); 112(?); 113; 114(?); 117; 135; 136; 145–150 (Egyptian *Hallel* in 113–118; Little *Hallel* in 146–150)
- b. Enthronement of God as King: 47; 93; 96, 97, 98, 99
- c. Hymns of Zion: 46; 48; 76; 84; 87; 122

E. A number of other psalms are classified according to their origin or use:

1. Royal Psalms

- a. Coronation: 2; 101; 110
- b. Wedding: 45
- c. Prayer for the king: 20; 21; 72; 132
- d. Praise and lament for the monarchy: 89
- e. King's confession of faith: 63 (?)
- f. Prayer by the king: 144
- g. Thanksgiving by the king: 18; 138(?)
- h. See also the mention of the king in Ps 28:8; 61:5–6; 78:70–72; 84:9.

2. Prophetic Psalms

- a. Divine instruction on theophany in worship: 50; 81
- b. Psalms with divine oracles: 12:5; 14:4; 68:12–13, 22–23; 75:2–5; 82:2–7; 89:19–37; 91:14–16; 110:1, 4; 132:11–18

3. Priestly/Liturgical Psalms

- a. Entrance liturgies: 15; 24
- b. Blessing: 91; 121; 128; 133; 134
- c. Processional: 68; 95; 100



Sigmund Mowinckel (1884 – 1965): student of Gunkel, emphasized the origin and use of the psalms in public worship, creative/original theory of origin of the so-called “Royal Psalms.”

4. Wisdom Psalms

- a. Torah: 1; 19; 119 (acrostic)
- b. Riddles: 49; 73; 78
- c. Proverbial psalms: 34 (acrostic); 127
- d. *Asbre* psalms: 1 (righteous person); 32 (forgiven person); 41 (charitable person); 112 (God-fearer); 128 (God-fearer)
- e. Acrostics: 9–10; 25; 34; 37; 111; 112; 119; 145(?)

F. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's (1906–1945) classifications:⁴

- a. Creation (eg. 8, 19, 29, 104)
- b. The Law (eg. 1, 19, 119)
- c. Holy History (eg. 78, 105, 106)
- d. The Messiah (eg. 2, 20, 21, 22, 45, 72, 69, 110)
- e. The Church (eg. 27, 42, 46, 48, 63, 81, 84, 87)
- f. Life (eg. 37, 63, 65, 73, 103)
- g. Suffering (eg. 13, 31, 35, 41, 44, 54, 55, 56, 61, 74, 79, 86, 88, 102, 105)
- h. Trust (eg. 23, 37, 63, 73, 91, 121)
- i. Guilt (eg. 6, 14, 15, 25, 31, 32, 38, 39, 40, 41, 51, 102, 130, 143)
- j. Enemies (eg. 5, 7, 9, 10, 13, 16, 21, 23, 28, 31, 35, 36, 40, 41, 44, 52, 54, 55, 58, 59, 68, 69, 70, 71, 137)
- k. The End (eg. 2, 96, 97, 98, 110, 148 – 150)
- l. Also can be classified according to the Lord's Prayer



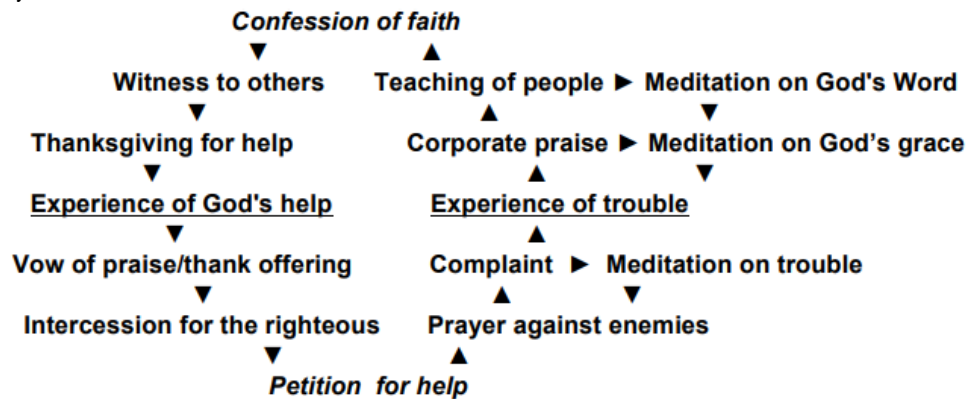
G. Traditional Christian Classifications

- 1. Penitential (expressive of an awareness of sin): 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143
- 2. Imprecatory (invoke divine judgment on enemies): 35, 55, 58, 59, 69, 79, 109, 137, 139

⁴ From *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible*.

3. Messianic (descriptive of the Messiah's person and work)
 - a. Speaking *of* or *to* the Messiah: 2, 8, 45, 72, 110, 118
 - b. Messiah as the speaker: 2, 16, 22, 40, 69

These systems of classification make good sense of many psalms, but some do not strictly conform to one genre. A recent scholar has proposed that the various psalms are part of a dynamic cycle of praise and prayer:



VI. The Structure of the Psalter

- A. Arrangement in Five Books: Just as there are five books of the Law and of prophecy, so there are five books of the Psalter as indicated by the eulogies: "Blessed be the Lord..." (41:13; 72:18–19; 89:52; 106:48).
 1. Book 1: 1–41 codified at the time of David's reorganization of Israel's worship?
 2. Book 2: 42–72 (Prayers of David 3–72; cf. 72:20): codified at the construction of the first temple?
 3. Book 3: 73–89 codified at the time of exile?
 4. Book 4: 90–106 (with Hallelujah after the first Hallelujah in 104:35) codified at the construction of the second temple?
 5. Book 5: 107–150 codified at the Ezraite reformation?

B. Collections of Psalms in the Psalter

Untitled Introductory Psalms: 1–2
 Psalms of Yahweh: 3–41
 Psalms of David: 3–32
 Untitled Hymn of Praise: 33
 Psalms of David: 34–41
 Psalms of Elohim: 42–83

Psalms of the Sons of Korah: 49–49,
 Psalm of Solomon: 72
 Psalms of Asaph and his descendants: 50, 73–83
 Psalms of the Sons of Korah: 84–85
Psalm of David: 86
 Psalms of the Sons of Korah: 87–88
 Psalm of Ethan the Ezrahite: 89
 Prayer of Moses: 90
 Untitled Psalm: 91
 Psalms of Praise: 92–100 (Enthronement Psalms: 93–99)
Psalm of David: 101
 Prayer of Afflicted Person: 102
Psalm of David: 103
 Untitled Hallelujah Psalms: 104–106
 Untitled Thanksgiving: 107
Psalms of David: 108–110
Untitled Hallelujah Psalms: 111–118 (Egyptian Hallel: 113–118)
 Great Hallel: 119–136
 Untitled Torah Psalm (also the Great or Giant Psalm): 119
 Fifteen Songs of Ascent: 120–134 (15 sanctuary steps)
 Psalm of Solomon 127
 Untitled Hallelujah Psalm: 135
 Untitled thanksgiving: 136
 Untitled lament from Exile in Babylon: 137
Psalms of David: 138–145
Untitled Hallelujah Psalms: 146–150

C. Each psalm concludes with the *Gloria Patri* (“Glory be to the Father...”). This has been the Christian practice since the Arian controversy of the 4th century, stressing the eternal divinity of each of the three Persons of the Trinity, and also confesses that the psalmody of the Old Testament praises the very same triune God.

1. In the West, the *Gloria Patri* follows each psalm.
2. In the East, it is sung after each *group* of psalms.

D. Theological Shape of the Psalter

1. Five Books as counterpart to Pentateuch; a meditation on the Torah
2. A handbook for meditation and prayer as in Psalms 1 & 2
 - a. Psalter as spoken meditation on the Torah (Ps 1:2)
 - i. Meditation as complaining to God in trouble (5:1; 39:3; 90:9)
 - ii. Meditation as praising the Lord (Ps 19:14; 35:28; 63:6; 71:24; 77:12; 143:5)

- iii. Meditation as instruction in wisdom (Ps 37:30; 49:3)
 - b. Taking refuge by petitioning the Lord and His Messiah (Ps 2:11)
- 3. Psalter as handbook for praise (see the Hebrew title)
 - a. Transition: laments in Books 1–3, praises in Books 4–5
 - b. National thanksgiving in 105, 106, 107, 118, 136
 - c. Hallelujah Psalms as goal of the Psalter:
 - i. 90–103 >> 104–106
 - ii. 107–110 >> 111–118
 - iii. 119–134 >> 135
 - iv. 136–145 >> 146–150
 - d. Psalter as handbook for divine wisdom
 - i. Psalm 1 on meditation as introduction to Psalter
 - ii. Psalm 73 on prosperity of the wicked as introduction to Book 3
 - iii. Psalm 90 on death as God’s judgment as introduction to Book 4
 - iv. Psalm 107 on thanksgiving for God’s deliverance of the righteous as introduction to Book 5
 - v. Psalm 111 on fearing the Lord by praising Him as introduction to Hallelujah Psalms 111–118
 - vi. Acrostic Psalm 145 on God’s gracious rule as introduction to Hallelujah Psalms 146–150
 - e. Psalter as a handbook for hope in the coming Messiah
 - i. Psalm 2 on the Messiah as God’s Son as the introduction to the prayers of David in 3–72 which are made in answer to God’s command in 2:8
 - ii. Psalm 72 with its intercession for the Messianic king and his universal rule as the culmination of the prayers in 3–71
 - iii. Psalm 89 with its lament for the loss of the Messianic king as the culmination of all the laments in 3–88, so that 90–91 and 92–150 are the answer to the apparent failure of the Lord’s covenant with David

- iv. Psalm 110 with its celebration of the Messiah's enthronement with God as the introduction to the hymns of praise in 111–118
- v. Psalm 144 with its royal petition and praise for victory as the introduction to the final outburst of praise in 145–150

VII. The Poetry of the Psalms

A. Types of Poetry

1. Epic

- a. A lengthy narration of exploits of one or more heroes (eg. Homer's *Illiad* or *Odyssey*)
- b. No epics in Scripture because of the aversion to the mythology and hero cult which were inseparable from epic poetry.

2. Dramatic

- a. Drama in a strict sense, whether prose or poetry, is absent in Scripture. Not interested in art *per se*, or entertainment.
- b. Job and Song of Songs take the form of dialogues.

3. Lyric

- a. Exemplified by the songs of the Old Testament
- b. Emphasizes more than other types the writer's feelings and thoughts in response to words or events

4. Didactic

- a. Exemplified by the proverbs of the Old Testament as seen in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.
- b. Designed to instruct.

B. What is poetry?

1. Imagery/effect:

Prose:

Jaël went out to meet Sisera, and said to him, "Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me; do not fear." And when he had turned aside with her into the tent, she covered him with a blanket. Then he said to her, "Please give me a little water to drink, for I am

thirsty.” So she opened a jug of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him. And he said to her, “Stand at the door of the tent, and if any man comes and inquires of you, and says, ‘Is there any man here?’ you shall say, ‘No.’” Then Jael, Heber’s wife, took a tent peg and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went down into the ground; for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died (Judg 4:18–21).

Poetry:

“Most blessed among women is Jael,
 The wife of Heber the Kenite;
 Blessed is she among women in tents.
 He asked for water, she gave milk;
 She brought out cream in a lordly bowl.
 She stretched her hand to the tent peg,
 Her right hand to the workmen’s hammer;
 She pounded Sisera, she pierced his head,
 She split and struck through his temple.
 At her feet he sank, he fell, he lay still;
 At her feet he sank, he fell;
 Where he sank, there he fell dead (Judg 5:24–27).

2. Parallelism: the most important feature of biblical poetry. This has been seen as the fundamental category for understanding Hebrew poetry since a series of lectures by English Bishop Robert Lowth on Hebrew poetry in 1753.

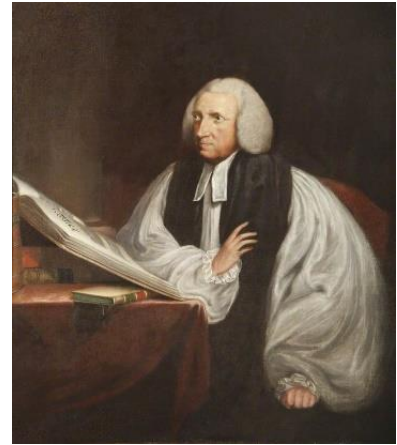
Instead of matching rhymed words at the end of each line, or the flow of syllables, parallelism matches corresponding thoughts, usually two (couplet), sometimes three. Three main types of parallelism:

- a. Synonymous: the second segment of the parallelism repeats the same thought as the first in almost identical words

The heavens declare the glory of God,
 and the firmament shows His handiwork (Ps 19:1).

Why do the heathen so furiously rage together
 and why do the people imagine a vain thing?
 The kings of the earth stand up,
 and the rulers take counsel together.
 ...

“Let us break their bonds asunder,
 And cast away their cords from us” (Ps 2:1–2a, 3).



- b. Antithetic: the second segment is the opposite of the first. More common in Proverbs than the psalms.

For the LORD knows the way of the righteous;
but the way of the ungodly shall perish (Ps 1:7).

- c. Synthetic/growing: the second portion advances the thought of the first in some way so that the two ideas together make up one greater idea. Various types:

Blessed is the man that has not
walked in the counsel of the ungodly,
nor stood in the way of sinners,
and has not sat in the seat of the scornful.
But his delight is in the law of the LORD;
And on His law will he meditate day and night (Ps 1:1–2).

- d. Hebrew poetry doesn't always have parallelism. Some verses cannot easily be divided into two thoughts (enjambment):

Be strong, and He shall establish your heart,
all ye that put your trust in the LORD (Ps 31:24).

I will give thanks unto the Lord with my whole heart,
in the company of the faithful, and in the congregation (Ps 111:1).

Psalms 110 has very little parallelism, except in verses 5 and 6:

The LORD said unto my Lord, "Sit at My right hand,
until I make Your enemies Your footstool."
The LORD shall send the rod of Your power out of Zion:
"Rule even in the midst of Your enemies."
In the day of Your power shall the people,
in holy raiment, offer You freewill offerings;
from the womb of the morning,
the dew of Your youth belongs to You.
The LORD has sworn and will not recant:
"You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek."
The Lord at Your right hand
shall smite even kings in the day of His wrath.
He shall judge the nations;
He shall fill the lands with dead bodies,
and smite in sunder the heads over many countries.
He shall drink of the brook in the way;
therefore shall He lift up His head.

3. Other features (nearly always lost in translation)

- a. Acrostics (111, 112, 145, 119)

- b. Assonance
- c. Alliteration

VIII. The Music of the Psalms

“A Lutheran pastor once told me of one of his parishoners who, whenever a Psalm was *spoken* in the Divine Service, Matins, or Vespers, would subsequently write a brief note to the pastor on one of those seemingly ubiquitous attendance registration pads or cards found in the hymnal pew racks of churches. The note read—succinctly and consistently—‘Psalms are meant to be *sung*.’”⁵⁵

Singing is how we pray the psalms.



A. In the Psalms themselves

1. Exhortations to sing to the Lord throughout the psalms
2. Musical terms in the psalms (“according to sheminith”: Ps 6, 12; “according to gittith”: Ps 8, 81, 84; “according to Lilies”: Ps 45, 69; “according to alamothe”: Ps 46; “according to mahalath”: Ps 53; “according to the Dove on the Far-Off Terebinths”: Ps 56; “according to Do Not Destroy”: Psalms 57 – 59, 75; “according to Lilies of a Testimony”: Ps 60, 80”; “according to mahalath leannoth”: Ps 88).

Selah, occurring 71 times, likely a musical instruction

B. Biblical Usage

1. Old Testament:
 - a. David’s organization of the temple choir (1 Chron 15:4–6).
 - b. Singing at the dedication of the foundation of the second temple (Ezra 3:11, Neh 12:31, 40)
 - c. Rabbinic tradition: antiphonal/responsive psalmody:
 - i. Use of a refrain by one choir (Psalm 136)
 - ii. Repetition of each line by second choir
 - iii. Alternate lines of parallelism sung by each choir.

⁵⁵ Daniel Zager, “Psalms Are Meant to Be Sung” in *Day By Day We Magnify Thee: Psalms in the Life of the Church*, *Journal for the Third Annual Conference of the Good Shepherd Institute* (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2003), 63.

2. New Testament: apostolic directive of singing psalms “to one another” (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16).
3. Musical instruments in biblical times

Singing was accompanied by what we would call an orchestra (see 1 Chron 15:19 – 21). The total number of King David’s musicians was 4,000 (1 Chron 23:5). In New Testament times the minimum number of musicians in the temple was 12 instruments, based on David’s appointment. More likely rhythmic than melodic in function.

- a. Stringed instruments (see Ps 4, 6, 54, 55, 61, 67, 76): harp, lyre
- b. Wind instruments (see Ps 81:3; 98:6; 150:3): shofar (animal horn), trumpet (straight, metal, valveless), flute (wooden)
- c. Percussion (see Ps 81:2; 149:3; 150:4): small handheld frame drum (like a tambourine), cymbals

C. Chant in early church, east and west

1. Responsorial: congregation or second choir sings refrain
2. Direct: singing of entire psalm together
3. Antiphonal: two choirs singing in alternation verse by verse

D. Metrical psalmody

E. Paraphrases

1. Luther: seven hymns
2. Isaac Watts