

## Psalms : notes

The book of Psalms is well known and loved by many Christians. The psalms are basically prayers and hymns addressed to God or which express truth about God in song. However the original poetic features are nearly always lost in English translation and we no longer have the tunes to which many of them would have been sung. Both factors create difficulties when trying to understand the psalms.

<b>What Psalms are</b>	<b>What they are not</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>are</b> a collection of inspired Hebrew musical poems, that is, expressions of praise, prayers and hymns <u>to</u> God</li> <li>• <b>are</b> frequently misunderstood and misused</li> <li>• <b>are</b> able to help us emotionally express ourselves to God and consider his ways, so they can become a guide to worship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>not</b> words <i>from</i> God</li> <li>• <b>not</b> immediately understood because the type and structure is not always fully understood</li> <li>• <b>not</b> primarily for teaching doctrine or behaviour because, as musical poems, psalms are meant to touch our emotions and feelings, just like any song</li> </ul>

The psalms were originally used as an aid to worship in the temple. They were later collected into 5 groups called books. These groups of Psalms are shown in some Bibles. The titles at the top of each psalm and the verse numbers were not part of the originals but added later.

### Notes about Hebrew poetry

#### ***Every word or phrase does not always have a special meaning***

A poem has to be read in full to properly understand it's true meaning. The words in psalms are often used to paint a picture, so cannot be examined on their own as in other parts of the Bible. Also, a psalm cannot be divided up into the individual verses and truth sought from within each separate verse. If we do that how, for example, can Psalm 105:34 & 35 and Psalm 85:12 both be true?

#### ***There is sometimes a repeat style, often in one of these ways:***

the 2<sup>nd</sup> or following lines  
**repeat or emphasis** the 1<sup>st</sup>  
line, for example

*The heavens declare the  
glory of God;  
the skies proclaim the work  
of his hands.  
Day after day they pour forth  
speech;  
night after night they reveal  
knowledge.*

*Psalm 19: 1 & 2*

the 2<sup>nd</sup> or following lines  
**contrast** the 1<sup>st</sup> line, for  
example

*The wicked borrow and do  
not repay,  
but the righteous give  
generously;  
those the Lord blesses will  
inherit the land,  
but those he curses will be  
destroyed.*

*Psalm 31: 21 & 22*

the 2<sup>nd</sup> or following lines adds  
**more information** to the 1<sup>st</sup>  
line, for example

*The Lord's teachings are  
perfect.  
They give strength to his  
people.  
The Lord's rules can be  
trusted.  
They help even the foolish  
become wise.*

*Psalm 19: 7*

Most Bibles show this kind of repeat by the way the words are laid out on the page. It is the repeats and lay out that give the words a pattern and rhythm which remind us that the psalms are poetry.

## Types of psalms

The psalms can be grouped into 7 main types which indicates the psalm's purpose. To understand a psalm it is important to realise which type it is.

Type of psalm	Description	Examples of the type
<b>Laments</b>	Psalms expressing a struggle or distress involving suffering or sadness. <i>Laments are the largest group of psalms.</i>	individual laments: 3, 22, 31, 39, 42, 57, 71, 120, 139, 142  group laments: 12, 44, 80, 94, 137
<b>Thanksgiving psalms</b>	Expressing joy and thanks to God because something has gone well or people had reason to thank God for his faithfulness or protection.	thanks from individuals: 18, 30, 32, 34, 40, 66, 116, 138  thanks from groups: 65, 67, 75, 34, 40, 66, 116, 118, 138
<b>Hymns of praise</b>	Praise for God for who he is, without reference to past misery or recent joy.	God as creator: 8, 19, 104, 148  God as protector 66, 100, 111, 114, 149  God as Lord of history: 33, 103, 113, 117, 145, 146, 147
<b>History psalms</b>	A retelling of God's saving works among the people of Israel.	(in chronological order) 105, 106, 78, 135, 136
<b>Psalms of celebration and affirmation</b>	renewal	50 and 81
	importance of David's lineage	89 and 132
	royal psalms dealing with kingship	2, 18 ( <i>also</i> thanksgiving), 20, 21, 45, 72, 101, 144 ( <i>also</i> lament)
	psalms involving a throne and a king	24, 29, 47, 93, 95 to 99
	songs of the city of Jerusalem	46, 48, 76, 84, 87, 122
<b>Wisdom psalms</b>	These give knowledge and insight	36, 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128, 133
<b>Songs of trust</b>	Expression of trust and confidence in God	11, 16, 23, 27, 62, 63, 91, 121, 125, 131

## Benefits of the Psalms

- **Expressing your thoughts** or feelings to God using an appropriate psalm.
- **Relating honestly to God**, following the examples in the psalms of expressing emotion, for example joy, sadness, disappointment, anger and so on.
- **Reflecting and meditating on what God has done** for you, which can lead into prayer and better relationships with other believers.