

Bible Overview

Psalms

Many human emotions are expressed in the book of Psalms. A psalm is essentially a poem that is sung - another way of saying that a psalm is a song! There are many authors of the psalms most of whom are acknowledged, although there are some that remain anonymous.

The authors went through many different experiences. Many psalms were the result of the writers' feeling of elation in the service of God. Other psalms were written by men who were in the depths of despair. Some relate to the history of Israel, and many are prophetic both of Jesus - the saviour, and Christ - the anointed, and of God's future kingdom. We might just draw attention to some of the psalms in some of these categories.

Messianic Psalms. These are generally given this title because they refer specifically to the work of Jesus and the Messiah. For example, **Psalm 2** questions why the nations rise up against the Lord and his anointed. **Psalm 22** commences with "My God, my God why have you forsaken me" - words quoted by Jesus on the cross. What better authority is there about the Messianic nature of this psalm than the authority of Jesus! Psalm 72 is another. Written by Solomon, this one refers to the coming kingdom that will last forever.

Praise Psalms. There were 24 psalms that begin or end with "Praise the Lord." These are often called the 'Hallel' psalms because of this - 'Hallel' being a shortened form of 'Hallelujah'. It is interesting that all of these psalms were anonymous which perhaps suggests that they had been written for Temple worship and were in common usage. Some of these psalms are 104 - 106, 111 - 120. There were 24 psalms that begin or end with "Praise the Lord." These are often called the 'Hallel' psalms because of this - 'Hallel' being a shortened form of 'Hallelujah'. It is interesting that all of these psalms were anonymous which perhaps suggests that they had been written for Temple worship and were in common usage. Some of these psalms are 104 - 106, 111 - 120.

Songs of Degrees. This was a special set (Psalms 120 - 134) that were sung while the Jews were ascending Mt Zion to celebrate the Temple feasts. They are a remarkable set in that they are a cameo of many aspects of life in themselves.

Psalms in Distress. David was one who was frequently distressed. There is a number of psalms that indicate the different forms this distress took. He was distressed, for example, that he was

persecuted by his enemies and he sought God's assistance (Psalm 4). He was distressed over his own sinfulness (Psalms 13 and 32), and he was distressed that there was so much wickedness around him (Psalm 55). The most important feature of these psalms is David's recognition of the need to rely on God for help.

Psalms of Hope. The Bible contains many examples of God's judgements on the wicked. At the same time, it contains many examples of the hope that the righteous have providing they place their trust and confidence in God. Some of the Psalms that suggest this hope are: 42, 80, 84 and the very beautiful but meaningful poem 137. Of course, the most well-known psalm of hope is 23.

The Authors. King David composed 73 psalms, and others were written by Asaph (12 - 73 to 83), the sons of Korah (11 - 44 to 49) Solomon, Heman, Ethan and Moses - the last three contributing just one each.

Structure. There are 150 psalms in the collection and they comprise five sections:

Book 1: 1 - 41; **Book 2:** 42 - 72; **Book 3:** 73 - 89; **Book 4:** 90 - 106; **Book 5:** 107 - 150.

Each section ends with words of praise such as: "Praise be to his glorious name for ever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen." (72:19). The only 'exception' to this is Psalm 150 which is, anyway, a psalm entirely of praise.

The ultimate message. Apart from the glorious messages covering a wide variety of circumstances, the real value to individuals is the way in which individually we can identify with many of the ideas and emotions expressed, and in the most beautiful language.
