**Web Page Material**

**A Short Introduction to the Book of Psalms**

First, the Book of Psalms is a collection of collections, the individual Psalms come from diverse periods of Israel’s history and the form we find in our Bibles represents the final stage in a process that likely took hundreds of years to complete in about the 4th century BCE.

Second, the psalms are divided into five Books. The ending of each book is marked with a doxology, blessing the everlasting God (see 41:13; 72:18 - 19; [89:52](https://www.biblestudytools.com/psalms/89-52.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank); 106:48; 150). While they are set out as five separate books, the editors, those who ordered the collection, also saw the them as a whole. Psalms 1 and 2 form the introduction and Psalms 146-150 are the conclusion. Psalm 150 can be viewed as the concluding doxology to the entire book of Psalms.

The five books of the Psalms are:

Book 1, Psalms 1-41

Book 2, Psalms 42-72

Book 3, Psalms 73-89

Book 4, Psalms 90-106

Book 5, Psalms 107-15

Three, there are a number of types of Psalms that can also be identified, and, with this identification, we should also recognise that different Psalms may be represented across more than one type. Some of these Psalm types are:

* Psalms of Lament these are both individual and corporate Psalms that bring troubling times before God and seek God’s intervention. They can be the cry of the poor and the oppressed, those facing enemies, or exiled from their land and people. They can contain cries for forgiveness and express a confidence in God’s desire to save his people. (Psalms 12, 13, 22, 140 as examples) Psalms of lament make up roughly a third of the book and are the largest category of Psalms.
* Psalms of Praise celebrate the wonders of God in creation and salvation calling God’s people to worship and sing God’s blessing. (Psalms 8, 93, 145 are examples).
* Psalms of Thanksgiving occur both as communal and individual Psalms. They tell of the great deeds of God in creation the nation’s history*.* (Psalms 9, 30, 100 are examples)
* Wisdom Psalms are so called because they reflect themes from other books of wisdom found in our Bibles, (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon) These Psalm reflect on wisdom, on the fate of the righteous and the wicked, and on the Law. (Psalms 1, 14, 19, 128 are examples).
* Royal Psalmsspeak of the monarchy as God’s vehicle of blessing for his people. people. In particular they reflect on King David while pointing beyond him to the one who will be Messiah, ‘You are my son, today I have begotten you’ (Ps 2) (Psalms 2, 20,21, 72 are examples)
* Psalms of Ascent this group of Psalms were sung by the people of Israel as they journeyed to the Temple for their Feasts. Some may date back to the return from exile. These Psalms speak of God’s protection during often-dangerous travels. (Psalm 122, 124, 131, 133 are examples.).

Four, the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE was a defining moment in the life of Israel. It was a time social and religious catastrophe as the community, the religious and social underpinnings of that community, were torn apart by military defeat, the destruction of the Temple and their exile in a strange land. To all appearances Israel’s God had been defeated and the old theological certainties were called into doubt.

As I said earlier the Psalms span many hundreds of years, but they were gathered into a final collection in the Post exilic period when issues of defeat and captivity, the return to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the Temple were still part of the recent consciousness of the nation.

The overall layout of the Book of Psalms may be seen to reflect the journey of Israel, the call of the nation, the Exodus, the monarchy, defeat, exile and return are all reflected in the Psalms. Key theological themes about God and humanity are explored in all the different circumstances that make up the nations and, hence, it’s people’s history. These key themes are:

* There is one God, creator and ruler of all. There are no other gods like Israel’s God, and he will bring restoration and salvation to his people.
* God made all creation good. The Fall (Gen 3) damaged the creation. Sin, rebellion against God, is an ever-present human reality that only God can heal.
* God chose Israel and made a covenant with them that was to bring salvation to all the nations. This covenant of grace and mercy calls all people to confess and to follow God’s word
* Finally, God’s kingdom will come. Other rulers may come and go and life will be filled with challenges, but God will prevail, his kingdom, his plan and propose will be fulfilled.

There is much more that could be said by means of introduction so please do check out the links on this site for a more detailed background.