

Psalms

Introduction: Known as the “hymn book” or “prayer book” of the Bible, the books of Psalms is a treasury of poetry and poetic theology. Written over the history of the Jewish people, the book of Psalms is traditionally attributed to David, although many are said to be written by others like Solomon, as well. While some psalms may well go back to David, many are clearly written well after his lifetime.

Structure: Modeling the five books of Torah, the book of Psalms is divided into five major sections including an introductory section:

Introduction: 1-2
Section 1: 3-41
Section 2: 42-72
Section 3: 73-89
Section 4: 90-106
Section 5: 107-150

Forms: Psalms are divided into three major types- lament, thanksgiving, and hymn. Lament songs occur when a person or people are crying out to God in pain. A thanksgiving or praise psalm is a response to something joyful in the life of a person or the community. And a hymn form is a psalm used in formal worship.

While in English poetry we see rhyme and meter and other structural elements, the major marker of Hebrew poetry is what is called parallelism. In parallelism we see lines doubled- most often for emphasis. At times there is alphabetic word play, where the beginning of each line of a psalm is based upon the Hebrew alphabet.

The lament Psalm is the most formally predictable of the psalms:

- A) Invocation
- B) Complaint
- C) Confession of trust
- D) Petition
- E) Resulting thanksgiving

Lament: Psalm 44; 22

Thanksgiving or praise: 19; 117