


Lesson 2
**Structure and Form
of the Book of
Psalms**



5 Book Divisions of Psalms



- 150 Psalms
 - Divided into 5 books.
 - No explicit substantive explanation for the division.
 - Each ends with a doxology.
 - First 4 ends with “Amen” – not found anywhere else in the Psalms.
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5 Book Divisions of Psalms



- **Book One** – *Psalms 1-41*
 - Doxology – *Psalms 41:13*
- **Book Two** – *Psalms 42-72*
 - Doxology – *Psalms 72:18-20*
- **Book Three** – *Psalms 73-89*
 - Doxology – *Psalms 89:52*
- **Book Four** – *Psalms 90-106*
 - Doxology – *Psalms 106:48*
- **Book Five** – *Psalms 107-150*
 - Doxology – *Psalms 150*



Suggested Parallel to Pentateuch



- This is a Rabbinic tradition which has no basis in the word of God.
- It is possible that the Law of Moses was split into 5 parts to match the division of the Psalms.
- Divisions may date back to David – *Psalms 106:48*
(Doxology for book 4) – *1 Chronicles 16:7, 36*



Suggested Parallel to Pentateuch



- **Book One:** *Genesis* – Issues related to man.
- **Book Two:** *Exodus* – Themes of national ruin and redemption or deliverance.
- **Book Three:** *Leviticus* – Focused on God's house or sanctuary and worship.
- **Book Four:** *Numbers* – Issues of peril, protection, and wandering.
- **Book Five:** *Deuteronomy* – Revealing and praising the word or law of God.



Signs of Organization



- While there is not much basis for the parallel of the 5 divisions to the 5 books of Moses, there are obvious signs of organization in the relationship some Psalms share together.
- **Pairings** – EX: *Psalms 105* (God's blessings in Egypt and Wilderness), *106* (People's sin in Egypt and wilderness)
- **Grouping** – EX: *Psalms 96-99* (ABAB pattern); EX: *Psalms 120-134* (A Song of Ascents); *Psalms 54-64* (Psalms of David with petition for deliverance)




Time Perspective



- *“The Book of Psalms shares with other portions of God’s word the extraordinary ability to draw instruction and learning from a multidirectional time scale.” (pg. 11)*
 - History (looking back), Present (current experience), Future (prophecy)
- *“The discovery, in itself, is profoundly instructional, in that it describes the three-fold nature of all learning.” (pg. 11)*




Inscriptions, Superscriptions, Titles, or Directions?

- Only 34 Psalms do not have inscriptions at their beginning (“orphan” Psalms).
 - These inscriptions are ancient, found in the manuscripts – they are a part of God’s word!
 - **Superscriptions** – an inscription at the top of, or beginning of a Psalm. (*cf. Psalm 3:0*)
 - **Subscriptions/Postscripts** – an inscription at the bottom of, or end of a Psalm. (*cf. Psalm 72:20*)
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Inscriptions, Superscriptions, Titles, or Directions?


- An indication of the work's nature.
 - EX: *Psalm 3:0 – “A Psalm”*
 - The name of the author.
 - EX: *Psalm 3:0 – “of David”*
 - The incident to which the Psalm refers.
 - EX: *Psalm 3:0 – “when he fled from Absalom his son”*
 - Musical instructions. (Likely subscriptions/postscripts)
 - EX: *Psalm 4:0 – “For the Chief Musician; on stringed instruments”*
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Inscriptions, Superscriptions, Titles, or Directions?

- **Psalm** – *mizmôr* – properly, instrumental music; by implication, a poem set to notes (STRONG)
- **Song** – *šiyṛ* – a song; abstractly, singing (STRONG)
- **Praise** – *tehilâ* – praise, song or hymn of praise (THAYER)
- **Prayer** – *tepilâ* – intercession, supplication (STRONG)
- **Maschil** – *maškiyl* – instructive, i.e. a didactic poem (STRONG)
- **Michtam** – *miktâm* – inscription (HALOT) (writing)
- **Eduth** – *ʿêdût* – testimony (STRONG)



Response Words – Hallelujah, Selah, Amen



- **Hallelujah** – *hâlal* (praise) *yâh* (contraction for *yhwh*, the proper name of God, “LORD”) (*Psalms 150:1, 6* – “Praise the Lord”) (*cf. Hebrews 13:15*)
- **Selah** – *selâ* – several views as to the meaning.
 - Instruction to the performers to change some aspect of the performance?
 - Part of the text to be sung?
- **Amen** – *’âmên* – verily, truly, amen, so be it (THAYER)



Types or Styles of Psalms



- **Didactic**
- **Worship**
- **Meditation**
- **Praise and Devotion**
- **Prayer and Petition**
- **Orientation** (*cf. Psalm 1*) – things are in their proper place.
- **Disorientation** (*cf. Psalm 88*) – circumstances have altered our perception of how things are.
- **Reorientation** (*cf. Psalm 30*) – faith in the order and blessings of God is strengthened through God's grace.



Other Groupings or Categories



- Acrostic or Alphabetic
- Royal
- Ethical
- Hallelujah
- Historical
- Thanksgiving
- Messianic
- Songs of Ascent or Songs of Degrees
- Penitential or Confession
- Suffering
- Imprecatory
- Series or Complimentary