

## Psalms Book 1 (Psalm 1 through 41)

In the Wisdom literature of the Bible, we come to the book of Psalms, the most popular book of the Old Testament for Christians throughout history. The Psalms are the most quoted Old Testament book in the New Testament. Jesus quoted from or alluded to the Psalms often. And in each case, he demonstrated that whichever Psalm he was quoting spoke of him.

Many beloved hymns are based on Psalms. A Mighty Fortress is Our God is based on Psalm 46; Jesus Shall Reign, which we don't regularly sing at HCF is based on Psalm 72. And of course, there are several we sing, which are rewording of the original Psalms such as Psalm 34, Psalm 130 and Psalm 90. That we have songs and prayers written nearly 3000 years ago that are still in such demand to read, pray, sing and memorize speaks of the absolute relevance of God's Word broadly, and the Psalms specifically, to our present day, circumstances and issues.

### Background and Introduction

#### Title, Authorship and Setting

The word **psalms** comes from the Greek word *psalmoi*. It suggests the idea of a "praise song," as does the Hebrew word *tehillim*. It is related to a Hebrew concept which means "the plucking of strings." It means a song to be sung to the accompaniment of stringed instruments. The Psalms is originally a collection of worship songs and poetry sung to God by the people of Israel with musical accompaniment. The collection of these 150 psalms into one book served as the first hymnbook for God's people, written and compiled to assist them in their worship of God. At first, because of the wide variety of these songs, this praise book was unnamed, but eventually the ancient Hebrews called it "The Book of Praises," or simply "Praises." This title reflects its main purpose—to assist believers in the proper worship of God. The frequently used *selah* seems to be a musical notation, perhaps a brief pause or interlude, to consider what is being sung or read, although no one knows for sure.

One author writes:

The Book of Psalms is not only the Bible's most popular book. It is also one of the longest and most complex books, containing a collection of religious Hebrew poetry extending over a period of about one thousand years, from Moses (Ps. 90) to the exilic era (Ps. 137). It achieved its final shape before the time of the New Testament. The book of Psalms contains a variety of genres. Some psalms are prayers. Some are praises, both individual and community oriented. Some express praise for who God is and what he has done in the past and will do in the future. Others ("new songs") express praise for recent personal intervention and deliverance. And still others praise God for his self-revelation of his nature, for his saving deeds, for Torah, and for Zion. Some psalms, by contrast, lament or complain and cry out to God for help in current crises. Some psalms ask for God to destroy the enemy without mercy. Some psalms are marked by exuberant joy, and others are marked by deep soul anguish and suffering. Some are prayers, and some are prophecies. Some express robust trust in God's providential care. Some provide historical narrative. Some sing of Zion, the place of God's dwelling. Some are "didactic," teaching through meditating on the law,

through historical narratives, or sounding like the books of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes. In some psalms the psalmist speaks to God; in others, he speaks of God to others. The Psalter consists of a wide array of genres indeed.<sup>12</sup>

The Psalms are filled with nearly every human emotion, and the Psalms deal authentically with them.

### **Authorship and Compilation**

The entire book of Psalms, commonly called the Psalter, was formed in stages through the history of Israel. The authors of many Psalms are expressly named, though many are not. The main compilers were likely David, Hezekiah, Josiah, and Ezra in consultation with the Levites, who used psalms by David and others before and after the construction of Solomon's temple. The last editor, possibly Ezra, organized the collection of the psalms of all the periods into the final five book form. This five-book form may have been used to reflect the five-book structure of the Torah and the history of the nation with a special focus on the Davidic king and the post-exile generation. Psalm 90 by Moses may be the oldest psalm (1410 B.C.). Some psalms such as psalm 126 are clearly post-exilic (circa 430 B.C.). This would give a span of a thousand years for the formation of the Psalter.

### **Literary Features and Content**

Psalms one and two function as an introduction to the whole Psalter. Psalms 146–150 serve as the conclusion. The Psalter is divided into five books. The first four books each conclude with a doxology which may be an addition of the final compiler (Psalms 41:13, 72:18-19, 89:52, 106:48). The concluding five psalms of praise in book 5 each finish with an exhortation to **"Praise the LORD"** and function as the closing doxology. There are principles of arrangement in successive psalms: same author, similar or contrasting situations, linking words and phrases. There are designations of type, connection with musical instruments, liturgical use, author or collection, historical occasion and so on. Specific authors are cited such as David (73 psalms), Levitical clan of Asaph (12 psalms), Levitical clan of Korah (11 psalms), Solomon (Psalms 72 and 127), Heman (Psalm 88), Ethan (Psalm 89), Moses (Psalm 90). There are 49 psalms with anonymous authors, one of which, Psalm 2, is ascribed to David in Acts 4:25-26.

The various psalms can be categorized by literary types, indicating the different subject matters they addressed or the various styles in which they were written. It is helpful to identify these classifications if the psalms are to be correctly interpreted. The basic genres are:

**Wisdom psalms.** These instructive psalms provide practical guidelines for godly living and give direction for righteous living in the pursuit of God's will (Pss. 1; 37; 119).

**Royal psalms.** Describing the coming messianic rule of the Christ, these regal psalms portray him as the undisputed sovereign King over heaven and earth (Pss. 2; 18; 20; 21; 45; 47; 68; 72; 89; 101; 110; 118; 132; 144).

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<sup>12</sup> Bruce K. Waltke and Fred G. Zaspel, [\*How to Read and Understand the Psalms\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 7.

**Lament psalms.** These highly emotionally charged psalms record the writer's heart cry to God for divine deliverance from trouble and pain (Pss. 3-7; 12-13; 22; 25-28; 35; 38-40; 42-44; 51; 54-57; 59-61; 63-64; 69-71; 74; 79-80; 83; 85-86; 88; 90; 102; 109; 120; 123; 130; 140-143).

**Imprecatory psalms.** Motivated by fiery zeal for God's glory, these provocative, and often controversial, psalms invoke God's wrath and judgment upon the psalmist's adversaries who were God's enemies. The psalmist called upon the Lord to punish the wicked and defend him as he carries out God's work in the midst of his persecutors (Pss. 7; 35; 40; 55; 58-59; 69; 79; 109; 137; 139; 144).

**Thanksgiving psalms.** These psalms express a profound awareness of deep gratitude for God's abundant blessings, whether individual or national (Pss. 8; 18; 19; 29; 30; 32-34; 36; 40; 41; 66; 103-106; 111; 113; 117; 124; 129; 135-136; 138-139; 146-148; 150).

**Hymn psalms.** These festive psalms foster celebration and praise for God as Israel recalled the Lord's goodness to them as they traveled to Jerusalem for their annual feasts or just (Pss. 43; 46; 48; 76; 84; 87; 120-134).

**Enthronement psalms.** These awe-inspiring majestic psalms describe the majesty of God's sovereign rule over all his creation and the providential care by which he sustains, controls, and directs it (Pss. 48; 93; 96-99).

### **Interpretive Considerations**

As this is an overview of the Psalms, particularly Book 1 (Psalms 1-41), we will list a few interpretive considerations. This is not exhaustive as that is beyond the scope of this study:

- Identify the historical context of the psalm if possible.  
From the data provided by the psalm itself and from any parallel historical information through other biblical books, attempt to capture the context out of which this psalm arose.
- Examine the psalm to see the flow of the poetry.  
Because of the dominance of parallelism in Hebrew poetry, focus on:
  - a) The identification of the parallel structures.
  - b) Examine the use of repetitive devices in the psalm; refrains, inclusio, keywords, synonyms, etc.
- Observe other literary techniques employed in the psalm: figures of speech, direct speech, ellipses, reversals, surprising turns, question and answer; etc.
- Provide a synopsis of the psalm's primary message in one sentence.
- Identify the psalm's literary type and note its goal (instruction, inspiration, admonition, celebration, mourning, confession, etc.)
- Note the broad structure of the Psalm
- Identify theologically and culturally significant expressions that inform the meaning.

From the ESV Study Bible:

Because the content of these songs is expressed in a poetic idiom, readers need to be ready to interpret such staples of poetry as image, metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, apostrophe (see [chart](#)).

Term	Explanation	Example
Image	A word or phrase that names a concrete action or thing; by extension, a character, setting, or event in a story is an image—a concrete embodiment of human experience or an idea.	the way (or path); the congregation (or assembly); nature (or harvest) ( <a href="#">Psalm 1</a> )
Metaphor	An implied comparison that does not use the formula <i>like</i> or <i>as</i> .	“The LORD is my shepherd” ( <a href="#">Ps. 23:1</a> ).
Simile	A figure of speech in which a writer compares two things using the formula <i>like</i> or <i>as</i> .	“He is like a tree planted by streams of water” ( <a href="#">Ps. 1:3</a> ).
Personification	A figure of speech in which human attributes are given to something nonhuman, such as animals, objects, or abstract qualities.	Light and truth are personified as guides in <a href="#">Psalm 43:3</a> .
Hyperbole	A figure of speech in which a writer consciously exaggerates for the sake of effect; usually that effect is emotional, and thus, loosely put, hyperbole usually expresses emotional truth rather than literal truth.	“My tears have been my food day and night” ( <a href="#">Ps. 42:3</a> ).
Apostrophe	A figure of speech in which the writer addresses someone absent as though present and capable of responding. By slight extension, an apostrophe might be an address to something nonhuman as though it were human and capable of responding, even if the speaker is in the presence of the object.	The poet in <a href="#">Psalm 148:3</a> might well be looking up at the sun, moon, or stars as he commands them to praise God.

As we come to the Psalms as Christians, we should approach them prayerfully and humbly, seeking to be mastered by them.

### **Theological Reflections and Messianic Implications**

As Christians, we also see the fulfillment of the Psalms in Christ as the final Davidic King and Yahweh’s Divine Ruler. But until Jesus comes to rule, the nations will rage. No human ruler will solve our political, social, and economic problems or fill our spiritual needs. Because we know this, we live by faith looking back to the first advent, and forward to the second advent of Christ.

The royal psalms portray the reign of God through his “son” in the holy city (Psalms 2, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, and 144). Psalm 110 looks to the future sovereign king who will establish the kingdom. Psalm 22 points to the coming, rejection, suffering, and ultimate triumph of the Messiah. The writers of the New Testament view many of the psalms as messianic and apply them to Jesus.

## Christ in the Psalms

- Psalm 2:7 -God will declare Him to be his Son → Matthew 3:17  
Psalm 8:6 -All things will be put under His feet → Hebrews 2:8  
Psalm 16:10 He will be resurrected from the dead → Mark 16:6-7  
Psalm 22:1 God will forsake Him in His hour of need → Matthew 27:46  
Psalm 22:7-8 He will be scorned and mocked → Luke 23:35  
Psalm 22:16 His hands and feet will be pierced → John 20:25-27  
Psalm 22:18 Others will gamble for His clothes → Matthew 27:35-36  
Psalm 34:20 Not one of His bones will be broken → John 19:32-33, 36  
Psalm 35:11 He will be accused by false witnesses → Mark 14:57  
Psalm 35:19 He will be hated without a cause → John 15:25  
Psalm 40:7-8 He will come to do God's will → Hebrews 10:7  
Psalm 41:9 He will be betrayed by a friend → Luke 22:47  
Psalm 45:6 His throne will be forever → Hebrews 1:8  
Psalm 68:18 He will ascend to God's right hand → Mark 16:19  
Psalm 69:9 Zeal for God's house will consume Him → John 2:17  
Psalm 69:21 He will be given vinegar and gall to drink → Matthew 27:34  
109:4 He will pray for His enemies → Luke 23:34  
109:8 His betrayer's office will be taken by another → Acts 1:20  
110:1 His enemies will be made subject to Him → Matthew 22:44  
110:4 He will be a priest like Melchizedek → Hebrews 5:6  
118:22 He will be the chief cornerstone → Matthew 21:42  
118:26 He will come in the name of the Lord → Matthew 21:9

**Book I: Psalms 1-41.** The first forty-one psalms were probably gathered during the early days of the Jewish monarchy by either David or Solomon. This first book highlights God's power in creation (Pss 8, 19) and is also dominated by themes of sin and redemption, kingship.

### Psalm 1: Two Ways

The opening psalm of the Psalter is classified as a **wisdom psalm**. It is not a prayer addressed to God, but rather a statement about human existence, on how humans want to live our lives.

**Main Idea: The righteous, those who reject the deceptions and defilements of the worldly system while trusting in God and His Word are blessed, while the wicked are unstable and will perish.**

Placed before the reader are two ways, two fundamental options, on how to live one's life. The psalmist says: Blessed is the one who chooses to follow the way of the Lord. He will bear much fruit. Jesus may have had this psalm in mind when he said: **"the tree is known by its fruit"** (Mt 12:33).

On the other hand, there are those who choose to ignore God's word, God's ways, and God's will. The way of the just (the one who entrusts himself to God) leads to blessedness and fulfillment. Everything else is an illusion and has no more substance than chaff that is so easily blown away by the wind. Psalm 1 reminds us of other Scripture passages like Genesis 2:16-17 in which God tells Adam and Eve concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, **"...in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."** Or Moses' speech to the Israelites before they enter the Promised Land: **"I have set before you today life and good, death and evil."** (Deu 30:15-20); Joshua's speech to the Israelites at Shechem challenging the assembly to decide whom they will serve (Josh 24); Jesus' Sermon on the Mount about those who build their houses on rock and on sand (Mt. 7:24-27).

## **Psalm 2: The King as God's Agent**

This is both a **royal and messianic psalm**. It may have been created to celebrate the coronation of a king and used again on the anniversary of the king.

**Main Idea: Although man attempts to resist God's kingdom, He has established his Son as Lord and King over mankind and invites all to submit to and embrace him before his wrath comes.**

During his reign, the king is regarded as God's agent and his "son." Attempts to overcome the king by enemies are seen as laughable in heaven (v.4). In verses 10-11, the unruly kings of the world are warned to revere God's king. One commentator writes, *"The world's rebellion against God is, in reality, a revolt against the reign of God's Son over all the earth. But all such attempts will falter and fail. All unbelievers are called upon by the Lord to bow before the Son before it is too late."*<sup>13</sup>

After the exile, when Judah had no earthly king, this psalm was prayed with an ideal king in mind—a messiah king. In the early church, Christians saw in this psalm the person of Christ.

## **Psalm 3: A Psalm of Lament and Confidence**

This is a prayer of David who feels very much cornered by the negative circumstances of his life. **It is a psalm of lament.** In addition, his enemies scoff at him, verse 3: **"There is no salvation for him in God,"**— words spoken by the soldiers during the crucifixion of Jesus, **"...he cannot save himself...let him come down now from the cross...let God deliver him now..."** (Mat 27:41-43) Throughout the psalm, we notice the psalmist's quiet but sure confidence in God. He proclaims that the Lord is his shield (v 3). Whenever he cries out to the Lord he is answered.

**Main Idea: In the middle of trials turn to God in trust and faith.**

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<sup>13</sup> Steven Lawson, [\*Psalms 1-75\*](#), ed. Max Anders, vol. 11, Holman Old Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2004), 22.

The psalm ends with a sense of peace. *“Salvation belongs to the Lord”* (v 8). We notice for the first time the use of the word Selah, not once but three times. The emotions expressed in Psalm 3 would be a great psalm to pray when all that is left is to hope in God. This is a psalm Jesus could have used in Gethsemane, or Paul in his prison cell.

### **Psalm 4: A Psalm of Confidence**

This psalm is an individual cry for help, a **psalm of lament**, occasioned by affliction due to falsehood, and may be a companion of Psalm 3.

**Main Idea: Amid persecution, seek God for relief and pray that those who persecute you will come to repentance.**

The reputation of the psalmist, David, has been damaged by a lie. *“O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame...love vain words and seek after lies?”* (v 2). He prays to the God whose help was experienced in the past. Then he proceeds to cry out to the wicked that they, not he, are in danger. In verse 7, the psalmist says that his relationship with God is way better than material abundance: **more join in my heart**. Verse 8 prompts us to ask the question: where do I turn when things are dark? Hopefully to the One who holds you in his hand.

*“In peace, I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.”*

### **Psalm 5: A God-Saturated Life**

This psalm has been used for centuries as a morning hymn or prayer. **It is a lament psalm.** We may be struck by the remarkable intimacy and openness between David and God. David’s life is captivated by God. Obviously, David wasn’t a perfect man, but he was a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam 13:14).

**Main Idea: God uses the one who has a high view of God.**

We have introductory petitions in verses 1-3; the lament filled with confidence in God in verses 4-6, followed by a petition with confidence for deliverance of the pray-er in verses 7-8, then a petition with confidence in God for judgment of the enemies. And finally, the prayer closes with public praise by the righteous faithful in verses 11-12.

### **Psalm 6: A Prayer for Mercy**

This is the first of the so-called seven penitential psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130 and 140), a designation that began in the seventh century A.D. for psalms suitable to **express repentance**. **It is a psalm of lament.** David, is heavily burdened physically and spiritually. In verse 3 he writes, *“My soul is greatly troubled.”* Perhaps he has sinned and is frightened by the wrath of God. He prays for deliverance day and night. Finally, God hears his prayer, *“The LORD has heard my plea; the Lord accepts my prayer.”* (v 9).

**Main Idea: Even though confession and repentance are painful, by them fellowship and confidence are restored.**

In psalms like this, we have a kernel of the gospel. So often in the gospel, Jesus' heart is moved with pity for those who are in agony in body and spirit or who are harassed by others; he is the Savior of the poor in spirit and those who mourn. (Matt 5:2-4).

### **Psalm 7: Fleeing to God's presence in a time of danger**

The heading links the psalm historically to Saul's attempts to kill David. By way of application, it is the prayer of an accused man who flees to God for help. He swears that he is innocent of any crime. **This is another psalm of lament**, though like other psalms of lament with great hope. Verse 1, *"O Lord my God, in you do I take refuge; save me from all my pursuers and deliver me..."*

**Main Idea: When unjustly criticized or persecuted, cry out to God for deliverance.**

In verses 7-14, the psalmist calls on the God of justice to come to his aid and put down his enemies who plot evil against him. The psalm ends with the innocent psalmist praising the God of justice.

### **Psalm 8: Extolling the majesty of God and the dignity of the human person**

**Psalm 8 is the first hymn of praise** in the Psalter.

**Main Idea: The majesty of God is expressed in the genius of His creation, even in the weakness of humanity to have dominion over it.**

While marveling at the inexhaustible grandeur of God (vs 2-3), the psalmist, David, is struck by the finiteness of human beings in creation (vs 4-5) and then by the royal dignity and power that God has bestowed upon them (vs 6-10) *"When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers..."* (v 3) It's as if the psalmist is out walking one night and is overcome with a sense of awe at God's majesty and his creation. "What is man...?" In comparison to the majesty of God's creation, humans seem very insignificant, yet God has delegated authority over the creation to us. Interestingly and fittingly, on July 20, 1969, astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin placed on the moon a capsule containing a copy of Psalm 8.

### **Psalms 9 and 10: Thanksgiving for victory; Prayer for justice**

In the Hebrew Bible, these two psalms are separated, but scholars believe that they form one psalm and are incorporated into one psalm in the Greek and Latin Tradition. Psalm 9 contains verses 1-21, and the rest is found in Psalm 10. **They are both Psalms of lament.**



**Main Idea: Rejoice in the Lord because he is sovereign over all nations, judging wickedness, protecting the innocent and eventually make right every wrong.**

Together the two psalms deal with four themes: Thanksgiving for victory over one's enemies (9:1-7); God's sovereign reign over the nations (9:8-21); a long reflection on why God allows the wicked to prosper (10:1-15); and the concluding verses on God's kingship and how he listens to the cry of the poor and wins justice for the downtrodden (10:16-18).

### **Psalm 11: In the Lord, I take refuge**

**Psalm 11 is a psalm of trust.** In a time of great crisis, the psalmist, David is counseled by his friends to flee to the mountains (the traditional hideout for people in danger). He chooses not to flee to the mountains, but to seek God's presence in his holy temple. God is his help in times of difficulty.

**Main Idea: Stand alone in faith, if necessary, when given wrong counsel. Resolve to seek God who is sovereign.**

In verses 1-3, we hear voices of despair, *"Flee like a bird to your mountain, for behold, the wicked bend the bow..."* Next, we see they have forgotten God, in verses 4-7, Verse 5, *"The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence."* The psalm ends with the Lord whose character is morally perfect, *"For the LORD is righteous...(v 7).* David looks with the eye of faith upon the situation, trusting God.

### **Psalm 12: Prayer of a man in the midst of violence and oppression**

**This is a lament psalm.** David asks for the Lord's saving help in a time when wickedness is dominant in society. The faithful or truth-speakers have vanished; liars and smooth-talkers prevail. David prays that the wicked be brought to justice.

**Main Idea: when things look hopeless, we should cry out to God and trust in his promises and protection.**

In verses 1-4 we see the power of lies; followed by the truth of the words of God himself in verses 5 with commentary in verse 6, *"Because the poor are plundered, because the needy groan, I will now arise," says the LORD; "I will place him in the safety for which he longs." The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times."* Followed in verses 7 and 8 by an expression of trust in the Lord amid the trial.

### **Psalm 13: How long, O Lord, how long?**

This is the prayer of a person experiencing ‘the dark night of the soul.’ **Psalm 13 is a psalm of lament.** David prays to a God who seems deaf and absent, even though David trusts him absolutely.

**Main Idea: When you are discouraged, call upon God for deliverance and rejoice in Him.**

Petition: Consider and answer me, O LORD my God...” (v 3) God is an intensely personal God and David is united to Him by deep faith. The language used in this psalm is the prayer of a man who is on the verge of death and who prays for healing lest his enemies interpret his death as divine judgment, **“lest my enemy say, “I have prevailed over him,” lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.** (v 4).

Confidence: The psalm ends with a beautiful act of trust and hope in God, **“But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me.** (vs 5-6)

### **Psalm 14: A lament over widespread corruption**

This **psalm of lament** is duplicated in Psalm 53. David imagines a world consisting of two contrasting types of people: the **“fool”** who has no regard for God in verse 1, and the **“generation of the righteous”** in verse 5.

**Main Idea: the entire human race is rebelling against God and his way, but the righteous remnant longs for God’s kingdom.**

It seems that the psalmist is moved to write this prayer-poem at a time when evil is so widespread that there is no one left to take care of the poor. He expresses a firm hope that God will come forth from the temple to punish the wicked and uphold the faithful.

### **Psalm 15 Who may be admitted into the Lord’s presence in the temple?**

Psalm 15 is a **hymn psalm**. This is a meditation on the holiness of God. The temple was not like a church that can be entered at any time.

**Main Idea: The one who worships God truly must be morally upright and value personal holiness.**

In verse 1, David asks the question, **“O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill?”** He answers in verse 2, and describes the answer in the remaining verses, **“He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart...”**

Only those sincerely seeking to follow God, and his ways could go into the inner courts of the temple. Several stipulations for entrance are named, many of them having to do with the right relationships with one’s neighbor. These were spiritual qualifications. The faithful who have

integrity and holiness won't be moved or shaken (verse 5). This corresponds to Psalm 1 and the tree planted by streams of water, as well as New Testament teaching concerning wise builders building on the solid rock of Christ (Matt 7:24-27).

### **Psalm 16: Prayer of trust in God**

This **psalm is a song of confident trust** in God in which David was able to live life fully because he was captivated by a living hope in God beyond the grave.

**Main Idea: Through adversity believers should rejoice in God, remembering His blessings including glorification.**

David declares his allegiance to the one true God, and he renounces all false gods. He develops a very intimate and peace-filled relationship with God. ***"The LORD is my chosen portion" (v 5); "I have set the LORD always before me (v 8)... Therefore, my heart is glad...my flesh also dwells secure." (v 9)***

### **Psalm 17: Prayer of one falsely accused**

This is a wonderful **prayer of lament** on behalf of those who are falsely accused by King David. It begins with a plea (intercession) for justice and deliverance (vs 1-2) and continues with a statement about one's innocence (vs 3-5). This does not mean he is sinless, but rather innocent of the crime in which he is accused.

**Main Idea: When persecuted, turn immediately to God, seeking to reveal sin, and protection.**

***"Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings" (v.8)*** It is a beautiful prayer of trust in God. Verses 10-14 are an extended metaphor about the psalmist's enemies whom he hopes God will destroy. And closes with him as a marked contrast in verse 15, ***"As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness."*** The first line of defense for a believer should be prayer to God, not our last-ditch effort.

### **Psalm 18: A royal psalm of thanksgiving**

This royal thanksgiving psalm for a military victory is duplicated in 2 Sam 22. Properly, **it is a Royal Psalm**. It is the fourth longest psalm in the entire book of Psalms. The title mentions that ***"the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, from the hand of Saul."*** With it being a long psalm, the main idea is remarkably straightforward:

**Main Idea: Rejoice in the LORD who rescues you from all your enemies.**

The psalm has two parallel accounts of rescue, the first told from a heavenly perspective (vs 5-20), and the second from an earthly perspective (vs 36-46). The first report adapts language of a cosmic battle between sea and rainstorm to depict God's rescue of the Israelite king from his enemies. Each report has a short hymnic introduction (2-4, 32-35) and conclusion (21-31, 47-51). This psalm encourages believers to make God our refuge with unwavering hope, assured that He must ultimately win the battle.

### **Psalm 19: The Glory of God**

This is a **wisdom psalm** extolling the glory of God manifested physically in the heavens (general revelation vs 1-6) and morally in His Word (vs 7-14). The voiceless heavens sing a song without words in praise of God and his creation. Verse 1, "***The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.***" Just as we may praise the work of an artist, the psalmist is filled with a sense of praise and wonder at God.

**Main Idea: God's self-revelation of Himself through nature and His Word leads His people to worship Him through obedience**

Verses 7-12 is a beautiful reflection on God's word as expressed in the Law. Such teaching refreshes the soul. Verses 13-14 are a beautiful prayer which reflect how one should rightly respond to God's magnificent revelation of himself – keep sin from having dominion over me, and let my thoughts and speech glorify God.

### **Psalm 20: Prayer for a king before he goes into battle**

**Psalm 20 is a Royal Psalm.** The psalmist is likely David. The theme is prayer for the king before battle.

**Main Idea: The psalmist and the people rejoice in God's victories over their enemies.**

Verses 1-5 are from the people praying for the king directly and to God indirectly. Verse 1 "***May the LORD (Yahweh) answer you in the day of trouble! May the name of the God of Jacob protect you!***"

Verses 6-9 seem to be a petition of the king on behalf of first himself, and then on behalf of the people. He expresses great confidence in God, Verse 7, "***Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.***" As we are constantly under attack by the world, the flesh, and Satan, this psalm helps us to cultivate an unshakeable trust in Christ as we put on the full armor of God.

### **Psalm 21: Rejoice in Victory**

The first part of **this royal psalm** is a prayer of thanksgiving and rejoicing in our heavenly king for the way he has blessed his earthly representative (vs 2-8).

In the second part of the psalm is a promise that the king will triumph over his enemies (vs 8-12) and ends with a doxology to Yahweh in verse 13, **“Be exalted, O LORD, in your strength! We will sing and praise your power.”**

**Main Idea: We should rejoice in God and His victories for us over sin and other enemies**

### **Psalm 22: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**

This psalm is a **song of lament** and is one of the most important prophetic psalms in the Psalter. It is a **messianic psalm**. We find its opening words on the lips of the crucified Jesus (Mk 15:34, Mt 27:46). Verse 1, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?...”** Several other verses are quoted or alluded to in the accounts of Jesus’ passion. One commentator writes, *“Written one thousand years before the first coming of Christ, this psalm reads as if it were actually recorded by a person standing at the foot of the **cross**. The very words spoken by Christ from the **cross**, as well as his thoughts and the injuries he suffered, are recorded here. David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, set forth in this psalm a graphic portrayal of the **cross** hundreds of years before crucifixion was even invented as a form of capital punishment. With the precision of an eyewitness observing the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ, David, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, wrote the most detailed description of the **cross** found anywhere in Scripture. Here is David’s preview of the **cross**, a masterpiece that has been called “the fifth gospel,” and “the gospel according to David.”<sup>14</sup>*

**Main Idea: Jesus is forsaken by the Father, killed by evil men, yet will entrust himself to the faithfulness of God.**

This profound lament ends with a long prayer of praise. The first complaint (vs 2-12) contains two beautiful expressions of trust (vs 4-6, 10-11). The second (vs 13-23) culminates in a prayer of petition (vs 20-22). Then follows a long prayer of praise (vs 23-32). The psalmist appears to have had an intense experience of the God who saves and delivers us from trouble. Even though Matthew and Mark’s gospels have Jesus quoting only the first line of Psalm 22, some scholars believe he may have prayed the whole psalm which ends praising God. We should trust God that He is able to protect, deliver, and save us as he **exhaustively knows all things.**

### **Psalm 23: The Lord is my Shepherd**

This is probably the best known and most beloved psalm. It is a **prayer of serene trust** in God.

**Main Idea: God is a faithful and loving leader of his people and provides for all their needs**

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<sup>14</sup> Steven Lawson, [Psalms 1–75](#), ed. Max Anders, vol. 11, Holman Old Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2004), 113–114.

Verses 1-4. God is described by David as Good Shepherd who knows how to provide his flock with good pastures and water to restore their strength. God, our Shepherd, is kind, loving and watchful. In times of drought, the shepherd knows how to provide for his sheep. So does God care and provide for us in times of pain and darkness.

Verses 5-6. Suddenly, the image of God as Good Shepherd switches to God as host at a banquet table. At banquets in ancient Palestine, the heads of guests are anointed with oil. With God as his host, the psalmist anticipates the continuance of divine goodness and kindness all the days of his life.

*“Psalm 23 is a Davidic psalm, the testimony of the anointed king to God’s faithful care. As such it points us to Christ. He also learned to live under his Father’s shepherding care. He knows the path in which to lead us, his flock, because once he walked that path himself ahead of us. He thus became “the great shepherd of the sheep” (Heb. 13:20), the “good shepherd” who protects his sheep at all costs, laying down his life for them (John 10:11). “To enter fully into the peace of [Psalm] 23, the pilgrim must first make the daunting journey through 22, through the place where the lonely representative suffers to the uttermost” for the benefit of all.”<sup>15</sup>*

## **Psalm 24: The King of Glory**

This psalm may have its origin as a **hymn in honor of God** the warrior who enters the temple when the Ark of the Covenant is brought into the temple (see 2 Sam 6:12-20).

**Main Idea: God in His glory comes into the presence of people, who must prepare to worship Him rightly.**

In verses 1 and 2 we are presented with Yahweh who is Creator and Owner of all things. Verse 1a, **“The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof...”** He is sovereign over all.

In verses 3-6, we see that He is Holy and who is spiritually qualified to come into His presence? Ultimately only One – The Lord Jesus.

Finally, in verses 7-10, David calls Israel to prepare to worship God in spirit and truth. It presents a battle-cry for the church of our day. Verse 8 is stirring, **“Who is this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle!”** **Our view of God must constantly be brought higher to see Him how He really is.** Right knowledge of God, with a humble attitude, leads to right living for God.

## **Psalm 25: Teach me your ways, O Lord**

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<sup>15</sup> Bruce K. Waltke and Fred G. Zaspel, [\*How to Read and Understand the Psalms\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 162.

This is a prayer of confidence by one who is carrying sorrow and guilt for his sins. **Psalm 25 is a psalm of lament.** David mixes urgent pleas (vs 1-2, 16-22) with expressions of confidence in God who forgives and guides us in his ways. The psalm opens with a beautiful act of trust in Yahweh: ***“To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust.”*** Then there is a plea to God to make known his ways, seeking direction from Him. In verses 7, 11 and 16-18, David asks God to remember his sins no more and to relieve his conscience and pardon his sins.

**Main Idea: Believers should seek deliverance from sin and enemies, direction from God in his ways and shelter from dangers.**

Is dependence upon God your continual state of being, or is he simply your last option? (See John 15:5 – Apart from you I can do nothing) Do you seek to know God’s ways and walk in them?

### **Psalm 26: Prayer of Vindication**

This is a **psalm of lament** written by David. A specific occasion is not provided. Yet we see his pure devotion to Yahweh.

**Main Idea: The psalmist seeks to be vindicated and rescued by God, through transparent examination of the accusations made against him.**

He seeks vindication in verse 1, ***“Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering.”***

David seeks to be examined by God in verses 2 through 8 with verses 6-8 being the core of the plea. Verse 8, ***“O LORD, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells.”*** David longs to be in God’s presence, it is the delight of his heart.

Verse 9 through 11 bring us to David’s prayer for deliverance, not only from his enemies, but from the same fate as his enemies.

Verse 12, concludes with confirmation that God has vindicated him, ***“My foot stands on level ground; in the great assembly I will bless the LORD.”***

Believers in Christ should live such lives of personal integrity that we welcome God’s watching eye. Do you seek God throughout all life’s circumstances?

### **Psalm 27: The Lord is my light and my salvation**

Psalm 27 is another **psalm of lament**, ascribed to David. In this well-known psalm, the mood of the psalmist swings from one of great confidence in God’s saving protection (vs 1- 8), exemplified by verse 1, ***“The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”*** to one of anxiety (vs 9-12) and back to confidence in verses 13 & 14.

**Main Idea: God's people can cry out to God in difficult situation and his grace will shine into their darkness.**

Not original to me, verses 1-3 express David's supreme **confidence** in God. Verses 4-6 express his **commitment** to God. Verses 7-12 his **cry** of deliverance to God, and finally, we see David's **courage** in God in verses 13 and 14. God has promised to keep and defend his people. To what or whom do you entrust yourself?

### **Psalm 28: A lament that ends well**

There are 37 psalms that are called individual prayers of lament. Some others are collective prayers of lament. Psalm 28 is an individual **prayer of lament**. In it, the psalmist prays to God imaged as a Rock (one who is secure and cannot be moved). Perhaps David is very ill and fears death. "***Verse 1, To you, O LORD, I call; my rock, be not deaf to me, lest, if you be silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit.***" The pit is another name for Sheol, the realm of death where neither God's word nor human praise is heard. To experience the silence of God is a foretaste of death.

**Main Idea: God delivers believers from evil and we should praise Him for hearing our prayers that align with His will.**

In verses 3-5, the David prays that he would not be swept away with the wicked in judgment. Verses 6-9 David shifts from deep concern to a beautiful expression of thanksgiving to God who has seemingly heard his cry for mercy.

### **Psalm 29: God's Sovereign Majesty**

This is a **psalm of praise**, ascribed to David. Sometimes this psalm is called the "Song of the Seven Thunders" for it mentions "**the voice of the Lord**" seven times.

**Main Idea: All creation should worship the sovereign God of heaven and earth.**

God is sovereign over heaven in verses 1-2. It begins by calling on the angels in heaven to praise God.

Verses 3-10 is a description of a great storm which represents God's voice. God is demonstrated as sovereign over earth. In verse 11 in His sovereignty, the hymn closes with an image of God in heaven blessing his people on earth. God's people exist to worship and give glory to God in all we do.

### **Psalm 30: God Restores**

**This is a thanksgiving psalm, attributed to David for deliverance from a life-threatening illness due to sin.**



**Main Idea: David calls out to God in repentance, God hears and forgives his sin of self-sufficiency, and heals his sickness**

In verses 1-5, The psalmist is delighted with God's answer to his prayer that. Verse 2, **"O LORD my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me."** In verse 6 & 7 we see the reason for God's discipline of David being the sin of self-sufficiency. God hid his face from David, and he was dismayed. In verses 8 through 12, as David cries out in repentance, God in his mercy removes his Discipline from him. In verse 12, the psalm ends with a shout of exultation: **"O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever!"** Seek God, his disposition to his people is compassion and mercy. Even his discipline is to lead us nearer to himself. He is not looking to smite his people, but to bless them.

### **Psalm 31: God is My Rock**

**This is a psalm of lament, ascribed to David.**

**Main Idea: Although your circumstances are less than perfect, you should trust God that he is with you and deliver you**

In verses 1-8 David cries in trust and dependence on God for deliverance from his enemies, based upon God's righteousness (v 1). In verse 5, we see an expression of total trust in God, **"Into your hand I commit my spirit..."** Later in Luke 23:46, David's greater Son quotes this as he hung on the cross. It is a picture of total dependence on the Father. In verses 9 through 24, we see a picture of David being rejected. Yet, his trust is ever in God and praise for God is always on David's lips: **"You are my God" "how abundant is your goodness" "Blessed be the LORD"**. When times are tough, do we keep trusting in God? Or do we let our circumstances dictate our feelings about God's love for us? We can be assured of God's love in the darkest of circumstances.

### **Psalm 32: Joy of Forgiveness**

This psalm opens with the David expressing a deep sense of gratitude for God's mercy. It is a **thanksgiving psalm**. It is also the second penitential psalm.

**Main Idea: Confessing sin, experiencing forgiveness, leads to joy and instructing others in the same path**

In verses 1-2, David writes of being cleansed of sin. It sounds like the Sermon on the Mount, verse 1. **"Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered..."** Verses 3-4 reveal the time before he confessed, when he tried to conceal the sin. Verse 5 expresses David's confession of sin to God. In the remainder of the psalm (vs 6-11), David encourages believers to confess sin to God. Verse 6, **"Therefore let everyone who is godly offer**

***prayer to you at a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him.***” David closes with an encouragement to trust in and rejoice in God. This psalm acknowledges with sin in a real way, and we should learn from David.

### **Psalm 33: Shout for Joy in Yahweh**

In this prayer/poem, which is a **psalm of praise**, the unnamed psalmist proclaims the Yahweh as the one in whom the righteous must place their trust and hope. The just (those whose faith is in Yahweh) are invited to sing the glories of God in verses 1-3, because he is ever faithful to his promises (v 4), the all-powerful Creator (v 6), and the wise and mighty Ruler of the world (vs 8-12) who sees and knows all things (vs 13-15) and who alone is the source of victory and salvation (vs 16-19). The hymn concludes with an expression of confidence in God’s goodness (vs 20-22). Verse 21, ***“For our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name.”***

***Main Point: Those whose faith is in God should praise Him for his Word, attributes and wondrous deeds.***

### **Psalm 34: Thank God**

**This is a thanksgiving psalm**, ascribed to David. It describes the benefits Yahweh bestows on those who fear him. It is an acrostic with each but the final verse beginning with successive Hebrews letters of the alphabet. Sections of 1 Peter 2 and 3 quote this beloved psalm. David gives thanks to God and invites the faithful to join him (vs 2-4). A description of how God heard his prayer and saved him in a time of trouble (vs 5- 10) follows. Wisdom personified exhorts God’s children to live and reap the rewards of a life centered in God (vs 11-22). The entire psalm revolves around the familiar verse 8, ***“Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!”***

**Main Idea: Believers should praise and glorify God for who He is, and what He does as he rescues His people from fear, distress and their sin.**

Are you broken by your sins and failures? Do you praise and thank God for His frequent intervention in your life? Have you tasted and seen that He is good?

### **Psalm 35: Great is the Lord**

**Psalm 35 is a psalm of lament** and is possibly a companion to Psalm 34.

**Main Idea: David seeks God to judge his enemies who are attempting to kill him**

Calling upon God to defend him (vs 1-6), David describes the wickedness (vs 7-12) and ingratitude (vs 13- 16) of his enemies, and then reiterates his plea for divine assistance (vs 17-28).

David's concern was more for God's glory than personal vengeance. Our motivation for praying against the plans of those who would hurt us, should be the advancement of the fame of Christ and his kingdom. We should trust God and leave vengeance to Him.

### **Psalm 36: Human wickedness vs Divine Providence**

This is a **lament psalm**/ prayer by David as one who feels threatened by the wicked -people who attack the righteous. David depicts the wicked in all their arrogance and moral deception, even self-deception (vs 1-4), and then comes before the righteous and gracious God, who punishes such wickedness and draws near in tenderness to the embattled righteous (vs 5-9). Verses 10-12 show the intimacy of the saving Yahweh with those who fear them, juxtaposed with Yahweh's judgment of the wicked. He will be glorified in both.

**Main Idea: There is a stark contrast between the depravity of wicked sinners and the infinite goodness of God, as David seeks God to vindicate the righteous and judge the wicked.**

### **Psalm 37: Why do the just suffer and the evil prosper**

**This psalm is a wisdom psalm** and addresses Job's problem: Why do the wicked prosper and the good suffer? According to the David, the situation is only temporary. God will reverse things, rewarding the good and punishing the wicked. In verses 1-11 David gives godly counsel, exemplified by verse 4, "***Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.***" This section is capped by verse 11, "***But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace.***" What stands out in this psalm is not David's solution or answer to the problem of evil, but his great faith and patience in the face of such a question. He knows experientially the truths expressed in the beatitude: "***Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth***" (Matt 5:5).

In verses 12 through 26, we see the stark contrast between the wicked and Yahweh. There are many comparisons in these verses. David builds our confidence in God. Verses 27-40 urge the reader to take the long view of the problem of evil: God wins in the end. See the sample of encouragement from verse 39, "***The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; he is their stronghold in the time of trouble.***"

**Main Idea: The godly should trust Yahweh to be delivered from evil, because even though the wicked may prosper for a while, God will judge them.**

God's people must **wait** on God's timing and not grow weary as they draw near to him in faith.

### **Psalm 38: Do Not Forsake Me**

This is a **psalm of lament**, the third penitential psalm. David is afflicted with deadly illness, which is due to his sin. Of course, we know not all sickness or affliction is caused by our personal sin, but David here acknowledges that in this case, it is true. In verses 1 through 8, we

are presented with David's inward and outward affliction, and he knows that God is disciplining him (verse 1). He is gravely ill and (vs 3, 5-8) and ostracized (vs 9-14) and recognizes that his own actions are the cause of physical and mental suffering and ostracism (vs 4-5,18 -where he confesses his sin to Yahweh). In verses 15-22 David recognizes that there is no one to turn to for help; only the Lord can break the cause-and-effect chain of past folly and present misery. He cries out in anguish to Yahweh, ***"Do not forsake me, O LORD! O my God, be not far from me! Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation!"*** (vs 21-22)

**Main Idea: Believers should be quick to cast themselves upon God's mercy, repenting of sin, when they find themselves under His judgment.**

### **Psalm 39: O LORD...let me know how fleeting I am**

Psalm 39 is the **lament psalm** of a divinely afflicted David, who first had resolved to remain silently submissive (vs 1-3). But the grief was too much and now he laments the brevity and vanity of life (vs 4-6). Verse 4 captures the urgency, ***"O LORD, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am!"***

Yet David, the man after God's heart, remains hopeful in God (vs 7-9). He then continues to express both acceptance of the affliction and hope for healing (vs 10-13). He submits to God's will.

**Main Idea: Knowing how finite we are we should confess our sins and seek God's mercy when sin against Him.**

We must learn to number our days. Do we realize how fleeting we are, especially as we consider the need to repent of sin and run to God? Do we discipline ourselves, in order that we might not fall into the discipline of God?

### **Psalm 40: To do your will is my delight**

**Psalm 40 is a psalm of thanksgiving**, ascribed to David. The theme of waiting developed in psalm 37, and which had painful application in psalms 38 and 39, blossoms here in a triumphant outcome.

In verses 1-10, we see waiting rewarded. Verses 1 through 3 show us rescue. David waited patiently for Yahweh (v 1), and Yahweh made his steps secure (v 2). In verse 3, ***"He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD."***

In verses 11-17 we find David's waiting renewed and a hint that trouble is still near. Verses 11-12, ***"As for you, O LORD, you will not restrain your mercy from me; your steadfast love and your faithfulness will ever preserve me! For evils have encompassed me beyond number; my iniquities have overtaken me, and I cannot see; they are more than the hairs of my head; my heart fails me."***

He closes in verse 17 with the recognition that he is still poor and needy. He praises God as his deliverer and seeks with faith deliverance once again.

**Main Idea: As believers recall God’s past deliverance from trials sins, we should, like David, cry out in faith to Him to deliver us from the next trial.**

He uses trials, deliverance from sins and “valley” experiences to mold us into the image of Christ. Do you praise God for delivering you from sins and trials? Do you delight in Him and doing His will? Do you turn to Him in trials?

### **Psalm 41: When feeling betrayed by people**

**Psalm 41 is a lament psalm.** In verses 1 through 3, David psalm begins with a blessing for those who have regard for the poor – which here it is clear the meaning is those who are weak and helpless. Yahweh is the main actor in these verses.

In verses 4-9 we see David’s confession of sin and his description of the emotional pain he experiences when people show no compassion for him in his physical affliction.

In verses 10 through 12, the psalm ends with a prayer of thanksgiving to the Lord who rescues and renews him.

And finally, fitting with the closing of the psalm and the entire Book 1 of Psalms we have David’s concluding doxology, ***“Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen.” (Psalm 41:13)***

### **Conclusion**

As we survey these 41 psalms, we get a glimpse of the what it means to be people of faith, wrestling with sin, evil, injustice and the emotions that are common to humanity; we get a larger view of the character and attributes of God: we see extended visions of his holiness, goodness, mercy, grace, compassion, love, judgment, discipline and wrath, to name but a few. We have also seen snippets and snapshots of the gospel and the ultimate Divine King Jesus who is more fully displayed in the New Testament.