The Book of Psalms:

The Holy Bible

It is also referred to as God's Word, or the Holy Scriptures. This book is made up by 66 books penned by various authors over a period of approx. 1600 years, although written by men; God is the ultimate author (2 Tim.3v16-17, 2 Pet.1v20-21).

The Book of Psalms

The Book of Psalms is a collection of prayers, poems, and hymns that focus the worshiper's thoughts on God in praise and adoration. Parts of this book were used as a hymnal in the worship services of ancient Israel.

The musical heritage of the psalms is demonstrated by its title. It comes from a Greek word which means 'a song sung to the accompaniment of a musical instrument'.

For practical purposes, the English title means 'Book of Songs'. The traditional Hebrew title is 'Book of Praises'.

The Book of Psalms

The Book of Psalms is the longest book in the Bible, with 150 individual psalms and is the most cited book by the New Testament.

It is also one of the most diverse, since the psalms deal with such subjects as God and his creation, war, worship, wisdom, sin and evil, judgment, justice, and the coming of the Messiah.

The book can be divided into 5 sections:

From ancient times Psalms has been divided into five books, each ending with a doxology. Some think that the final editor of the Book of Psalms arranged the various psalms into five sections, perhaps imitating the five divisions of the Law: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy:

I. Book 1: 1-41 Genesis
II. Book 2: 42-72 Exodus
III. Book 3: 73-89 Leviticus

IV. Book 4: 90-106 Numbers

V. Book 5: 107-150 Deuteronomy

The date and authorship of Psalms

a): Author:

The brief descriptions that introduce the psalms have David listed as author in 73 instances. David's personality and identity are clearly stamped on many of these psalms. While it is clear that David wrote many of the individual psalms, he is definitely not the author of the entire collection.

Asaph: 12 Psalms (50, 70-83) Ethan the Ezrahite: 1 Psalm (89)

Heman the Ezrahite: 1 Psalm (88)

Korah's descendents: 11 Psalms (42, 44-49, 84-85, 87-88)

Moses: 1 Psalm (90) Solomon: 2 Psalms (72, 127)

• Fifty of the psalms designate no specific person as author.

With the exception of Solomon and Moses, all these additional authors were priests or Levites who were responsible for providing music for sanctuary worship during David's reign.

The Septuagint (sometimes abbreviated LXX is the name given to the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures) *gives additional authorship identifications as follows:*

Ezra: Psalm 119
Haggai and Zechariah: Psalms 146-147
Hezekiah: Psalms 120-134
Jeremiah: Psalm 137

b): Date:

A careful examination of the authorship question, as well as the subject matter covered by the psalms themselves, reveals that they span a period of many centuries.

- The oldest psalm in the collection is probably the prayer of Moses (90), a reflection on the frailty of man as compared to the eternity of God.
- The Davidic Psalms would have been written around the year 1000 B.C., and some of the later Psalms were written after the exile (Psalm 126, 137).
- The latest psalm is probably (137), a song of lament clearly written during the days when the Hebrews were being held captive by the Babylonians, from about 586 to 538 B.C.

It is clear that the 150 individual psalms were written by many different people across a period of a thousand years in Israel's history. They must have been compiled and put together in their present form by some unknown editor shortly after the captivity ended about 537 B.C.

History of the Compilation of the Psalms

Since the Psalms comprise such a long period of time, from that of Moses to Post-exilic times, it is no surprise that they were most likely accumulated in stages. Since the grouping of the Psalms appear to date back to an early period, it is most likely that each of the 'books' of the Psalms were compiled separately and then combined into the book which we have today.

- 1): Book I (Psalms 1-41) was most likely arranged by David or someone under his direction.
- 2): Book II (Psalms 42-72) was possibly compiled after the life of David. Psalm 72v20 apparently states that the prayers of David are now ended and as such would seem to be the end of David's collection comprising Psalms 1-72.
- 3): Book III (Psalms 73-89) was possibly compiled during the time of Josiah or even Hezekiah although we cannot be certain of this.
- 4): Book IV and V are miscellaneous Psalms, the date of which is uncertain.

There are nine types of Psalms

- 1): Messianic prophetically speak of the coming Messiah or some aspect of his Kingdom (examples are Psalm 2, 8, 22, 47, 69, and 110).
- 2): Lament a cry to God for help (examples are Psalm 7, 26, and 60).
- 3): **Testimonial** a declaration by the writer of God's goodness and deliverance (examples are Psalm 30 and 34).

- **4): Pilgrim** also known as 'songs of ascent' used by pilgrims as they journeyed to the holy city (examples are Psalm 120-134).
- **5): Imprecatory** seek God's judgment on his enemies (examples are Psalm 58 and 109).
- **6):** Penitential mostly written by David over sorrow for his own sin (examples are Psalm 32 and 51).
- 7): Wisdom give guidelines to God's people (examples are Psalm 37 and 73).
- 8): Historical look back on God's dealings with Israel (examples are Psalm 78, 105-106).
- 9): Nature describe God's handiwork and power in nature (examples are Psalm 8 and 19).

Duplicated Psalms:

- a. Psalm 14 and 53 (notice 14 uses *Yahweh*, traditionally 'Lord', and 53 uses *Elohim* 'God')
- b. Psalm 40v13-17 and Psalm 70
- c. Psalm 108 and Psalm 57v7-11 plus 60v5-12

The key verses of Psalms are

<u>Psalm 22v16-19</u>: 'Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing'.

<u>Psalm 23v1</u>: 'The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not be in want'.

<u>Psalm 29v1-2:</u> 'Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendour of his holiness'.

<u>Psalm 51v10</u>: 'Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me'.

<u>Psalm 119v1-2</u>: 'Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD. Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart'.

Selah!

The word 'Selah' (occurs 71 times, it also appears three times in the third chapter of Habakkuk) is a difficult term to define, but the possible meaning may be:

- To signal a pause for the music to catch up.
- To highlight places in the psalm where the worshipers were to lift up their voices or the instruments or even the hands.
- Something like; to 'pause, stop and listen'. Think or meditate on this!
- Has a similar purpose to 'Amen' in that it stresses the importance of the preceding passage.
- To emphasise a blessing, and could mean 'forever'.

Having been told everything from 'the original Hebrew has been lost' to, 'Jewish scholars agree it means forever', it is very easy to get confused!

God knew that the Psalms would be read and not sung over many years of their use, and that there would be confusion about a musical term put into them. He also knew they would be printed in a book to teach his people spiritual concepts of his word of truth in the end time.

As such, it seems highly likely that he would put in a word to call special attention to exhort us to 'weigh' these things thoughtfully, and to reflect and consider in good sense judgment what is 'really' being said, whether we read or sing the psalms.

Christ in the Psalms

God's provision of a Saviour for His people is a recurring theme in the Psalms.

Some prophetic pictures of the Messiah are seen in numerous psalms:

- ▶ Psalm 2v1-12 portrays the Messiah's triumph and kingdom.
- ▶ Psalm 16v8-11 foreshadows His death and resurrection.
- ▶ Psalm 22 shows us the suffering Saviour on the cross and presents detailed prophecies of the crucifixion, all of which were fulfilled perfectly.
- ▶ The glories of the Messiah and his bride are on exhibit in Psalm 45v6-7.
- ▶ While Psalms 72v6-17, 89v3-37, 110v1-7 and 132v12-18 present the glory and universality of his reign.

Practical application

One writer says, "Like the windows and carvings of medieval cathedrals, the Psalms were pictures of biblical faith for a people who had no copies of the Scriptures in their homes and could not have read them" (1).

John Calvin describes the Book of Psalms as, "'An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul;' for there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. Or rather, the Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life all the grief's, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated"(2):

One of the results of being filled with the Spirit or the word of Christ is singing. The psalms are the 'songbook' of the early church that reflected the new truth in Christ.

God is the same Lord in both these psalms. But we respond to him in different ways, according to the specific circumstances of our lives. What a marvellous God we worship, the psalmist declares, One who is high and lifted up beyond our human experiences but also one who is close enough to touch and who walks beside us along life's way.

We can bring all our feelings to God—no matter how negative or complaining they may be—and we can rest assured that he will hear and understand. The psalmist teaches us that the most profound prayer of all is a cry for help as we find ourselves overwhelmed by the problems of life.

- **1.** To express the divine word spoken *in* rather than *to* man
- **2.** To reveal the character of God through the praise, complaint and exhortation of God's people so that the reader may be willing to submit himself to the Lord
- **3.** To enable the reader to come into contact with God through the expression of the common, subjective daily experiences of others
- **4.** To encourage our confidence in God's faithfulness by the words of others when our own life experiences do not seem to support that faith
- **5.** To affirm the certainty of God's future rule on earth through the line of David and all his people, that this Lord, who sovereignly rules the universe, will ultimately bless the righteous and that the wicked will be finally judged
- **6.** To provide a worship hymnal and a devotional guide for the Temple-centred Jewish faith

7. To encourage believers to enjoy God and his benefits
Personal Notes:

(1): La Sor et al, *Old*, p. 530: The Book of Psalms By: David Malick. http://bible.org/article/book-psalms (2): Commentary on the Book of Psalms by John Calvin, p. xxxvii.