



WEEK 22: Psalms Overview

Main Point: God is open to whatever we want to say to Him—the full range of life’s sorrow and joy. We can thank Him, or we can tell Him we’re mad at Him. Whether we’re happy or depressed, worried, or hopeful, God welcomes us.

Writer: Almost half the psalms—73 of 150 are attributed to David. But these bylines weren’t in the earliest scrolls. And they’re phrased vaguely. Calling a psalm “of David” can mean it’s “by David,” “about David,” or even “inspired by David.” Other psalms are attributed to Solomon and Moses, along with the music ministry leaders Korah and Asaph. Some psalms aren’t attributed to anyone.

Date: Most psalms are impossible to date because they express intimate feelings instead of historical facts. Some psalms, though, refer to life during the Jewish exile in Babylon—in the 500s BC. So the psalm could span about a thousand years, back to the time of Moses in the 1400s BC.

Location: Most psalms are about people in Israel. But some are set in Egypt. And others are set in Babylon which is now Iraq.

Five Books in One

Psalms is divided into five books, each ending with a short doxology—a hymn of praise to God. Each one of these doxologies start with the words “Praise the Lord,” which helps clearly mark the beginning and end of each section.

Jewish scholars say it’s no coincidence that there are five books.

These five sections parallel the five books of Moses—the most revered material in the Jewish Bible. The books of Moses contain the heart of Jewish law and tradition.

One Rabbi in ancient times described the connection this way: “Moses gave the five books of Law to Israel and David gave the five books of Psalms to Israel.”

Book 1: Chapters 1-41, containing most of David’s songs.

Book 2: Chapters 42-72, including some songs of the musicians Korah and Asaph.

Book 3: Chapters 73-89, almost exclusively songs of Korah and Asaph.

Book 4: Chapters 90-106, mostly psalms with no bylines.

Book 5: Chapters 107-150, mostly songs for special occasions such as festivals and pilgrimages to Jerusalem.