The Christology of the Psalms

Presentation by Dr. Wallace Pratt

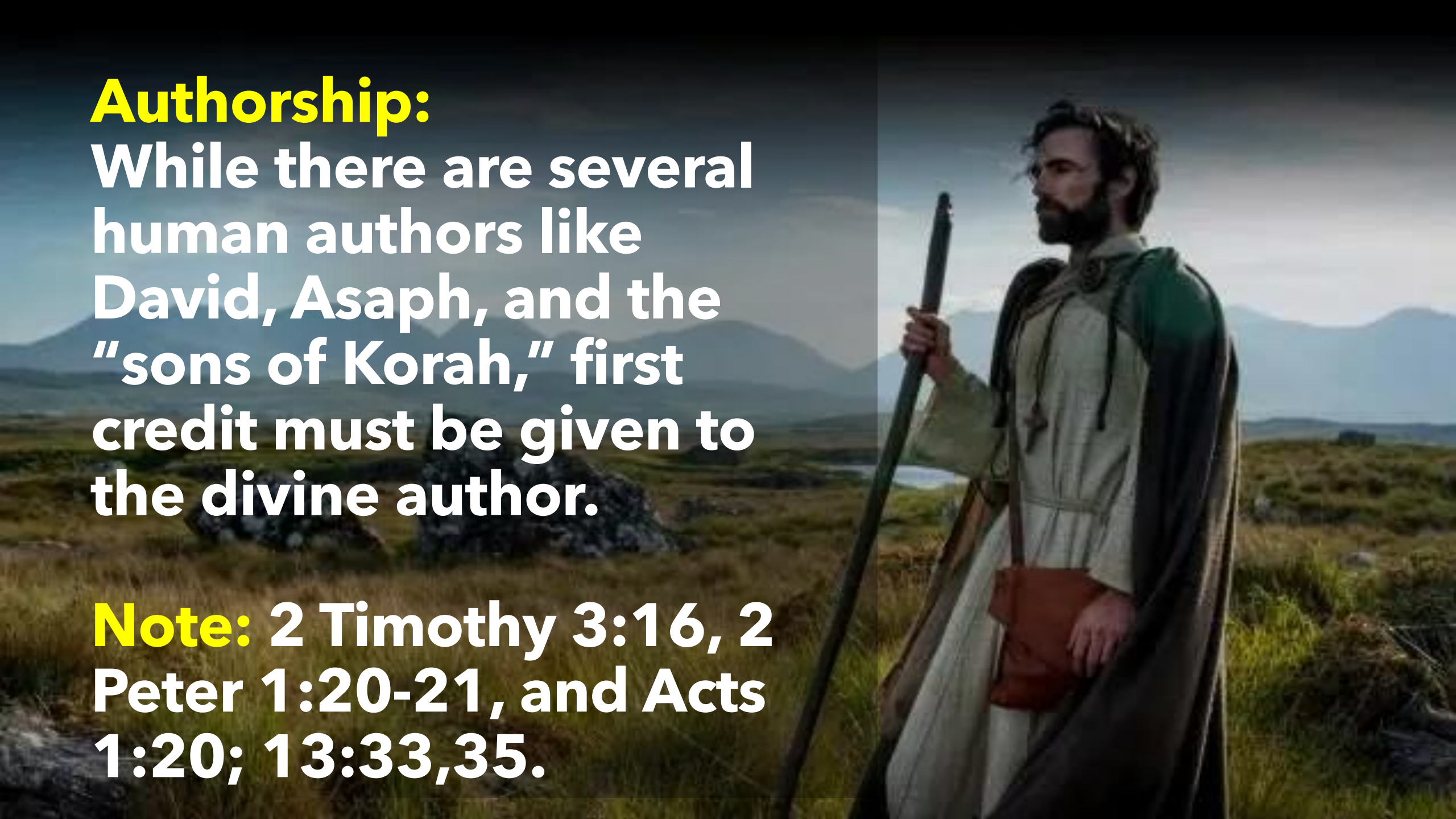


Introduction

The amazing and inspiring psalms are a collection of 150 songs, prayers, and poems.



On the night of Jesus' betrayal at the last supper (*Seder*), they sang a hymn (Matthew 26:30), a traditional *paschal praise* from Psalm 136, called "the great Hallel". The hymn or song repeats frequently the words, "O give thanks to the Lord…"



Authorship:
While there are several human authors like David, Asaph, and the "sons of Korah," first credit must be given to the divine author.

Note: 2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:20-21, and Acts 1:20; 13:33,35.



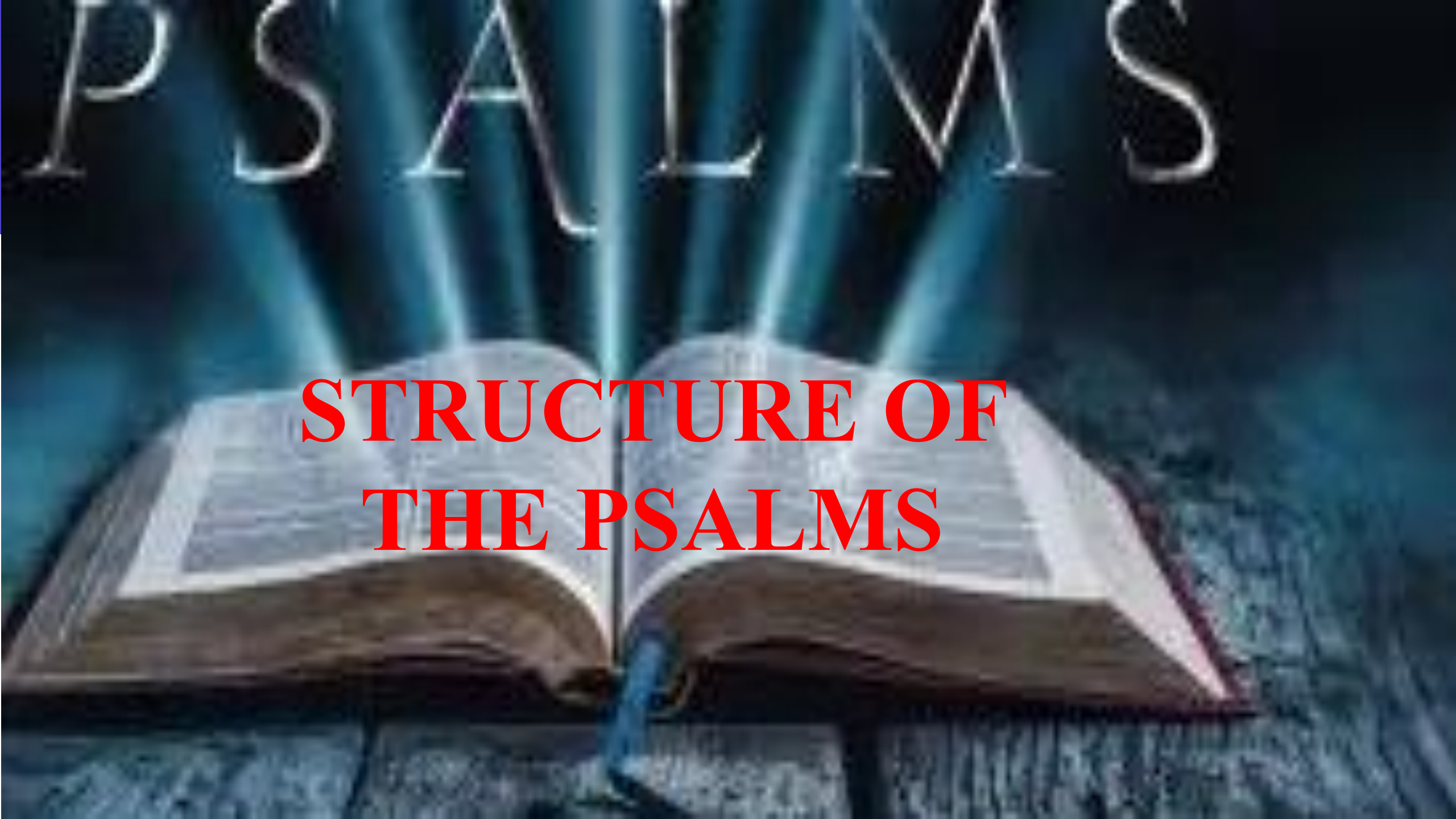
The Five Major Themes of the Psalms

1. Monotheism
2. Creation and Fall
3. Election and Covenant
4. Covenant Membership
5. Eschatology



Types of Psalms

1. Laments
2. Hymns of praise
3. Hymns of thanksgiving
4. Hymns of celebrating God's law
5. Wisdom psalms
6. Songs of confidence
7. Royal psalms
8. Messianic psalms
9. Historical psalms
10. Prophetic Hymns



STRUCTURE OF THE PSALMS

The final structure of Psalms is accredited to the priest called Ezra (*note*- the book of *Nehemiah*, chapters 8 and 12). His editorial work to preserve and catalog the Law and the Psalms is credited (especially in the *Talmud*) with the order of the five books that coincide with the Pentateuch:

Book One: Psalms 1-41

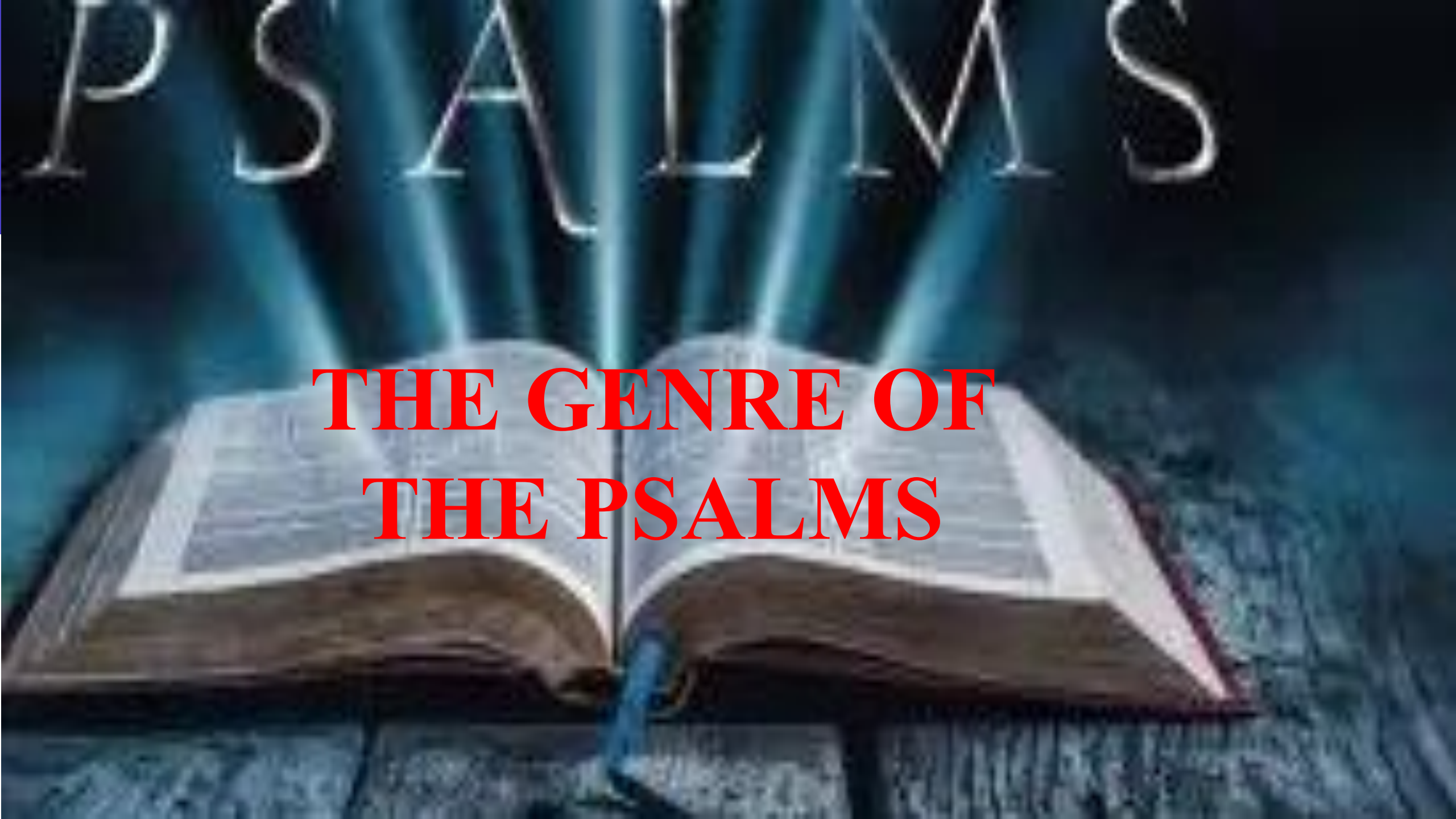
Book Two: Psalms 42-72

Book Three: Psalms 73-89

Book Four: Psalms 90-106

Book Five: Psalms 107-150





THE GENRE OF THE PSALMS



The Genre of the Psalms

1. **Hymns**
   - *A type of psalm called *Maschil*
2. **Wisdom**
   - *Usually sung by a *Cantor*
3. **Confidence**
   - *Precious writing called *Michtam*
4. **Lament**
   - *Sound of sorrow- *Neginoth*
5. **Thanksgiving**
6. **Remembrance**
7. **Exaltation of Royalty**
8. **Instructional**
   - *In Hebrew, to commence instruction through a ceremony (music) *Shavuot*



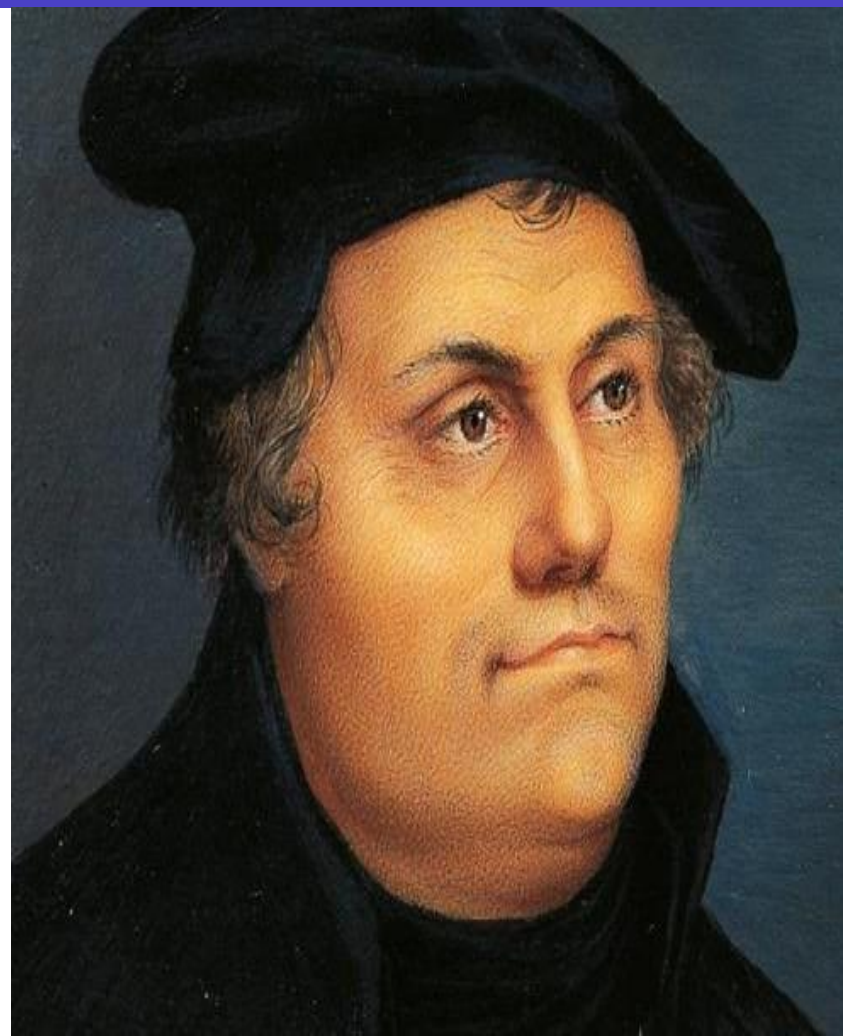
Five Discerning Messianic Questions

The Two Divergent Views to the Christological Psalms

1. What is it that makes a psalm Messianic?
2. Are there certain concepts that set some psalms apart as Messianic?
3. Must a psalm have a predictive element in it that the NT recognizes as a reference to Jesus Christ?
4. What relevance do Messianic psalms have to their own historical context?
5. Some Messianic psalms speak directly of Christ (like psalms 2, 16, 22, 110), but does that mean that other psalms do not have a correlation or connection to Christ?

Martin Luther's approach to the Psalms

- **Luther could not accept any philosophy that placed man's logic as equal to faith in Jesus Christ.**
- **Luther argued that the whole Bible is about Jesus Christ and He is the true spiritual sense of Scripture.**
- **Based on *Luke 24:44*, Luther believed that many of the psalms that do not directly relate to Christ often carried a Messianic undertone or meaning.**
- **The heart of the reformer Luther concluded that the psalms which do not directly relate to Christ have content that indirectly embodies the truth of the life, work, and minister of Jesus Christ.**



John Calvin's approach to the Psalms

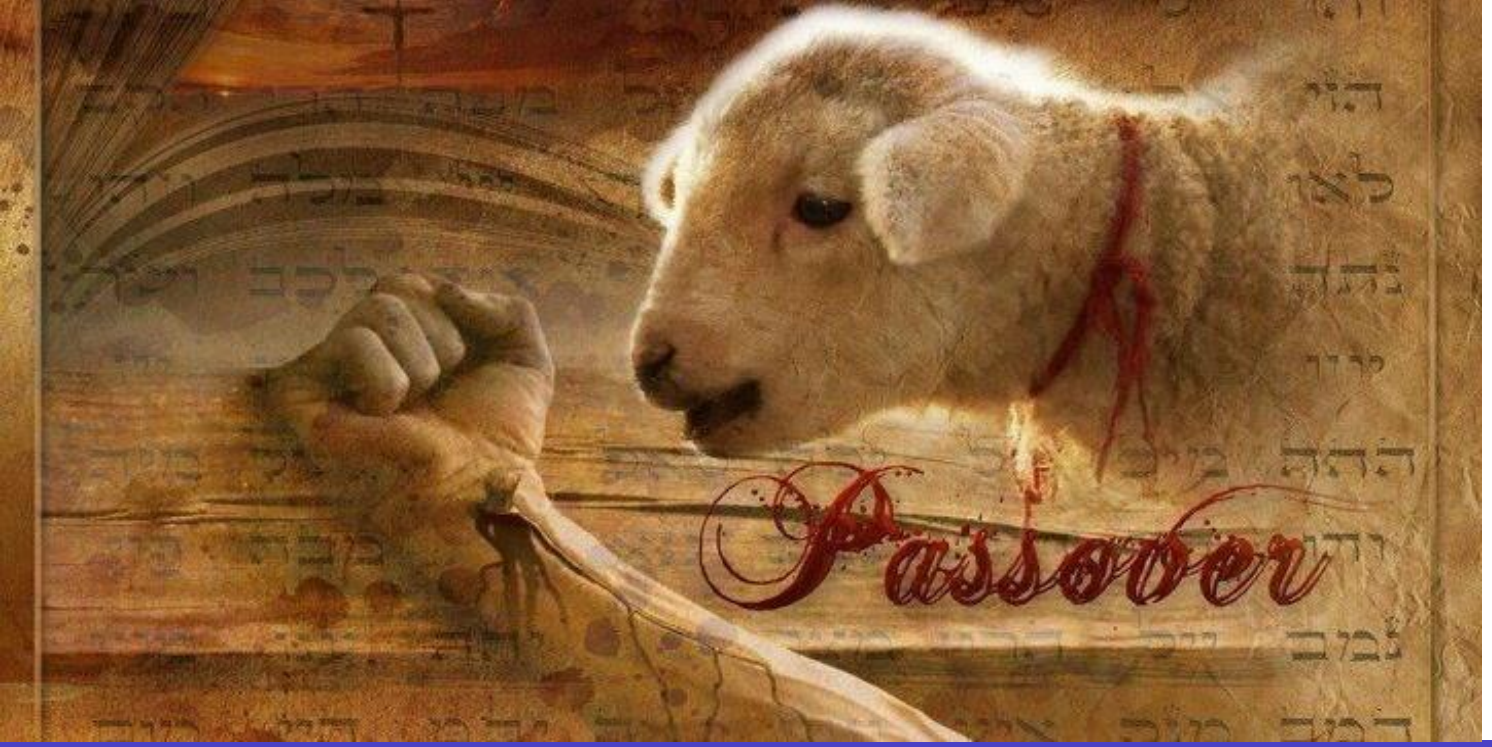
- **Calvin was a pragmatist and fully adopted the *natural theology* or philosophy of the Dominican Thomas Aquinas.**
- **Calvin's interpretation based only on a human author and the historical situation, greatly limited his analysis of a psalm being Messianic or Christological.**
- **He tried to apply any and every reference to the king and the kingdom to David (*such as Psalm 110*), and this created major interpretive contradictions in his work.**
- **Calvin interpreted Psalm 47, as a reference to David and his kingdom. Yet, an honest reading of *Psalm 47*, especially verses 2-8, demonstrate that only the Messiah (Jesus Christ) could fulfill such a glorious role of a "King who is God" Himself. Calvin rejected this idea.**





The Christological Approach to the Messiah in Psalms

It sees the importance of the historical context, the grammar of the Old Testament, the literary characteristics of the text, and interprets them in light of what the psalm teaches us about God (theology). Most Roman Catholic, Conservative Evangelicals, and Pentecostal theologians believe that the Christological Approach recognizes the divine author by interpreting the Old Testament as more than just a human author but divinely connected to its Messianic fulfillment in the New Testament.



The Christological Approach to the Messiah in Psalms

A psalm can be considered Messianic if it deals with the person of the king. The Christological view of the Messiah applies to any additional aspects involved in 1) the right of the king, 2) the promises of salvation, 3) the work that must be done to carry out those promises, 4) the person or paschal lamb required in addition to the king, 5) the realm over which the Messiah reigns, and 6) the results of his reign. To those insisting that a *suffering Messiah* is not indicated in the OT, they ignore Luke 24:44,46 that fulfills Psalm 22.

Indirect Messianic Psalms

There are *three main issues that surface* in examining the psalms that may be applicable to the God-man Jesus Christ. 1) Who is the one speaking, 2) What is the situation behind the lament in the psalm, 3) Who are the enemies that oppress the person or group? Psalms 26, 51, 73, 79, 88, 109, and 137 are all songs or prayers that could easily depict the suffering Messiah and the subsequent praise given in the context.



Indirect Messianic Psalms

Early respected reformer theologians like Martin Luther and Robert Bellarmine attribute to the Messiah the following: Psalms 18, 30, 32, 34, 92, 107, 116, 118, 138. They are typical of the thanksgiving genre and are often debated as to whether or not they are Indirect Messianic Psalms. As mentioned earlier though, be careful when interpreting psalms that are neither *Royal Psalms* nor *Direct Messianic Psalms*.





Royal Messianic Psalms

The king and his reign have a prominent place in the Psalms, much more so than concepts associated with either the prophets or the priesthood. At the heart of the theology of the psalms is the idea of kingship, concerning both the human king and God as king. Some scholars argue that the organizing metaphor for the theology of the psalms is the concept 'the Lord reigns.' (Read- Deuteronomy 17:14-20.)

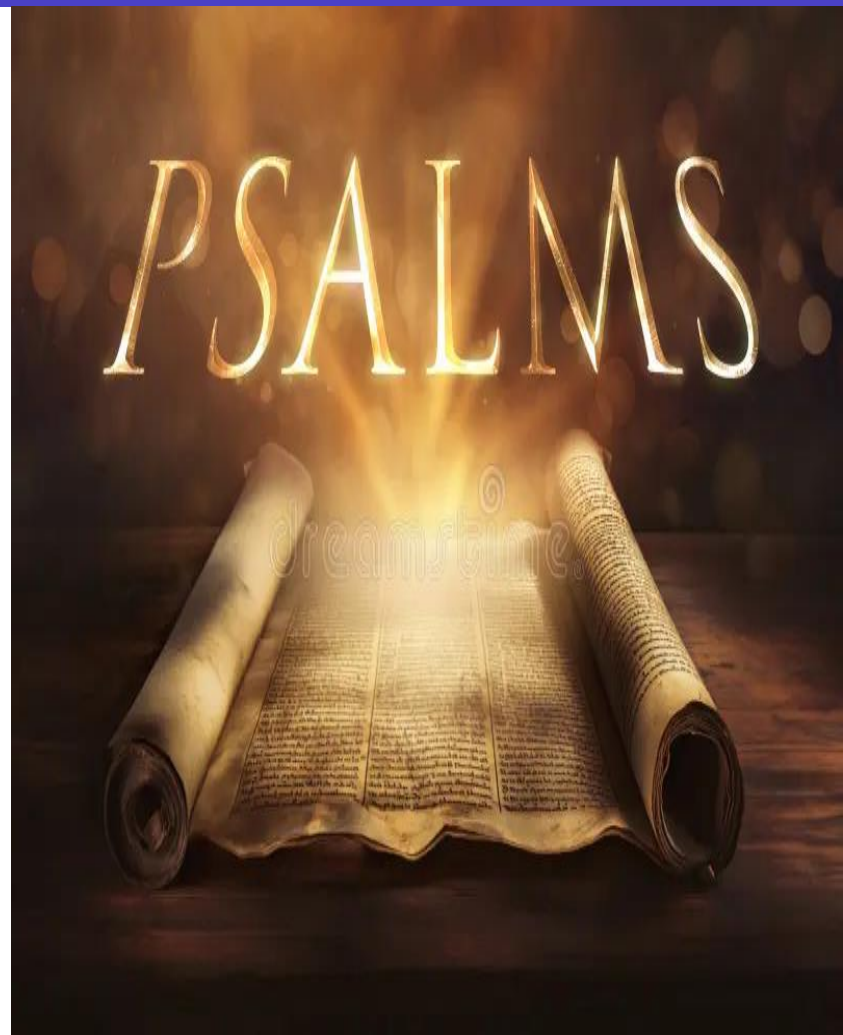


Royal Psalms include these: Psalms 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132, and 144.

The kingly blessing (2 Samuel 7:12-16) included the right of enduring dynasty, protection from enemies, and the establishment of a *father-son* relationship. The lesser 'king' is designated 'son',' as well as 'servant.' Therefore, any Davidic king could be called 'son of God' and could expect the blessing and protection included in the Davidic covenant. But did they wholly fulfill that office? What is most remarkable about the *Royal Psalm* is how close the relationship is between the king and God.

Direct Messianic Psalms

These psalms speak directly of the Messiah and His work, and they are used in the New Testament which confirms their Christological theme. There are clearly at least fourteen songs indicated as Direct Messianic Psalms: 2, 8, 16, 22, 40, 45, 68, 69, 72, 89, 109, 110, 118, and 132.



Direct Messianic Psalms

Jesus Christ dedication in the Temple by Simeon (Luke 2:25-32, the Messianic Anointing), and later His procession on Palm Sunday into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1-9), are only a foreshadowing or foretaste of His final entrance at the Second Coming. Let us together say "Hallelujah to the Messiah!" *Direct Messianic Psalms* almost always correlate to a New Testament reference.





Student Exercises in Christological Analysis

- Break-up into groups of 3-4 persons; please, not more than four in a group.
- Choose one person to be your spokesperson.
- Your group will select three psalms that include, to the best of your discernment an example of an Indirect Messianic Psalm, one that is a Royal Psalm, and one that is an Indirect Messianic Psalm.
- Be prepared for your spokesperson to tell the class why the content of that psalm convinced you that it was that kind of Messianic Psalm.

Conclusion

Every genre and type of psalm includes repeated references to the relationship of the Psalms to Christ.



The Christological approach considers the full contextualization of the psalms in their 1) historical or literary setting, 2) the unfolding of revelation through redemptive history, 3) the unity of the purposes of God for His people, and 4) the fullness of revelation in Jesus Christ. This approach recognizes that both the human author and divine author are important for this interpretive approach.