

## **#15. THE BOOK OF PSALMS**

1. **Psalms is a book of worship and praise for the people of Israel.** The Hebrew title *Sepher Tehillim* means *Book of Praises*. Though it is generally considered poetry, most of the Psalms were set to music, though the original melody has been lost. It belongs to the genre known as *Hebrew Poetry*, or *Wisdom Literature*. Much more than mere songs, the Psalms contain wisdom, express a broad range of human emotions, and paint compelling pictures of God who loves His people deeply.
  
2. **The authors are numerous.**
  - David wrote 75 songs. 73 are directly attributed to David, and the New Testament attributes 2 of the *anonymous Psalms* (Psalm 2; 95) to David (Acts 4:25; Hebrews 4:7).
  
  - Asaph wrote 12 songs.
  
  - The Sons of Korah wrote 10 songs.
  
  - Solomon wrote 2 songs.
  
  - Moses, Heman, and Ethan each wrote 1 song.
  
  - The authors of 48 songs are not identified, although Ezra is thought to have written some of these.
  
3. **The Date:** The Psalms were written over a broad period of time, beginning with Moses (around 1440BC) and continuing until the return from exile as late as the late 400's BC.

#### 4. Key Verses

- Though it is nearly impossible to isolate every significant verse, the overall theme of the Psalms is found in Psalm 150:6 NASB - *“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!”*
- *Psalm 1 is viewed as the foundation of the hymnbook - an honoring of God and His Word.*

#### 5. Key People

- **David** - Though David is responsible for only half of the songs, the context of his life is the practical grid in so much of Israel’s worship. His life story is the frame which presents the faithfulness of God in the structure of Psalms.
- **The Congregation of Israel** - Worship can occur on an individual level. However, both Old and New Testaments recognize the exponential power of concerted worship, praise, and devotion.

#### 6. Key Places

- **Jerusalem and The Temple of God**

#### 7. Key Themes

- **Praise** - the idea behind praise is exaltation of God for what He has done. Through the Psalms, the People of God celebrate the providential, protective, and powerful works of God.
- **Worship** - just as praise points to what God has done, the idea of worship focuses on the nature and character of God. His character includes love, grace, mercy, faithfulness, and goodness. He is characterized as omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. The conclusion is that The Lord is good and everything He does is good (Psalm 119:68).

- ***Thankful Hearts*** - through the Psalms, we are learning who God is, and can trace his works throughout the history of creation and in His interventions for His people. Our hearts rejoice with thanksgiving and gratitude for all He has done.
- ***Emotion*** - the songs of this book give expression to a full range of human emotions. The authors reflect hope and despair, victory and defeat, the desire for love and hate, forgiveness and revenge. The lesson is that God understands our passions, and He is our source of victory in every circumstance of life.

**8. The Contents of The Psalms** - The Book of Psalms is not easily outlined. However, there are several types of Psalms.

- **There are Psalms in which individuals cry out to God for help in dealing with their problems, troubles, and trials**
  - Examples include Psalms 3, 12, 25-28, 35, 38 and 51.
- **There are Psalms dealing with needs for corporate (community) help with problems, enemies, and oppression.**
  - Examples include Psalms 54-57, 59-61, 63, 64, 69, 74, 79, 80, and 83.
- **There are Psalms of grief and mourning.**
  - Examples include Psalms 85, 88, 90, 109, 120, 123, and 140.
- **There are Psalms of Thanksgiving.**
  - Examples include Psalms 8, 18, 19, 91 and 150.
- **There are Psalms of Worship.**
  - Examples include Psalms 93, 99, and 120-134 (Songs of Ascent as worshippers approached the Temple in Jerusalem).

- **There are Messianic Psalms that point to Jesus.**
  - Examples include Psalms 2, 20, 21, 45, 89, 101, 110 and 144.
  
- **There are Psalms of Wisdom.**
  - Examples include Psalm 119 and Psalm 1.
  
- **There are Psalms of Justice (also called Imprecatory Psalms) that call out to God for vengeance and justice.**
  - Examples include portions of Psalms 7, 35, 40, 55, 58, 79, 109 and 137.

### **Worth noting**

- The compilation of the Psalms into their present form probably occurred during the Post Exilic era and was first used in its unified form in the Second Temple period under Ezra and Nehemiah. The Psalms were certainly used during earlier times as part of smaller collections (Psalms of David, Psalms of Asaph, Psalms of Korah, and several thematic collections).
  
- Many scholars believe the 150 Psalms originally numbered 147 different songs. Psalm 14 and 53 are essentially the same and two have been divided (Psalm 9 and 10 and Psalm 42 and 43).

### **When reading the Book of Psalms:**

- Remember the Psalms are given to assist us in learning not only to worship and praise God, but also to productively express human emotions such as grief, joy, anger, loneliness, fear, and frustration.
  
- Remember you are reading a song. Certain emphasis has been lost without the melodies, but you can create your own! We thank God for modern musicians who are restoring melody to the songs!