



Psalms

Of the 70's and 80's



Psalms or Psalter?

Psalms


From the Greek “psalmos,” meaning “twanging of a harp”

Also Greek “psallien,” meaning “to pluck or play a stringed musical instrument”

Another meaning: HYMN

Psalter

A printed collection of hymns



What do we encounter in the Psalms/Psalter?

Bible: Inspired words of God – from God to humanity

Creation



Ancestry and Covenant

Wisdom

Gospel Story

New Testament Letters

Psalms – with a few exceptions, original Psalms focus on words of humanity to God. Or, in some cases, repeating what we know God has revealed to us through God's promise and blessings.



“The Psalms are the prayers and songs of generations of Israelites who strove to define their relationship to and communicate with the God they called the Lord.”

“The Psalms are encapsulated with the joys, the grief, the questions, and the praises of our ancestors in the faith.”

- Nancy deClaisse-Walford



Timeline of the Psalms

- Very difficult to pinpoint each Psalm, but that points to timelessness of the words of the hymn
- Some apparently written in the period of United Kingdom (David and Solomon ruled in 1000 BCE)
 - but many point to time of Divided Kingdom, subsequent fall (950-586 BCE) known as the Pre-exilic Period
 - Others point to postexilic period 538 (return) and 515 (rebuilding of the temple)



Timeline of the Psalms

- After the Second Temple Period (post 515 BCE)
 - Prayers and songs collected and ordered into the book we call the Psalms
 - Placed within the canon of scripture (Hebrew Bible)
 - Transformed in a way that no longer words of humankind to God, but inspired word of God to humankind.
 - Words of encouragement and hope – to community in turmoil

- We can hear and read humanity calling out to God, and God's response in the *same hymn*



Forms of the Psalms

Hermann Gunkel (early 1900's) classified the Psalms into literary type

We identify four major form genre of psalms in the Psalter:

HYMNS

1. ***Hymns of Community*** (sung during worship)
2. ***Thanksgiving Hymns of Individual*** (sung by single voice)

LAMENTS

3. ***Community Lament*** (protest and grieve tragedies, injustices, and threats to community)
4. ***Individual Laments*** (appeals to God for threats to personal life or lives)



Minor Types/Forms

Gunkel also identified four minor genres (subject matter)

1. **Royal Psalms** (Lord's provision for kings during the monarchy – unified and divided)
2. **Creation Psalms** (God's sovereignty over created world and place of humanity in it)
3. **Wisdom Psalms** (Instruction in right living and right faith in tradition of wisdom writings – Proverbs, Eccl, and Job)
4. **Enthronement Psalms** (celebrates the Lord as King among the people of God; the 'kingship of God.')



How did Israel survive as an identity?

- “Postexilic community found and recalled a satisfying rationale for survival.”
- “King, court, and temple were gone, but Israel survived because it pulled these songs and hymns into a document about their identity – a part of the Hebrew bible.”
- “The postexilic community indeed found a way to [remember and lift up experiences] and reveal [a certain structure] – order, coherence, and meaning.” – Henry Franfort, 1977
- Yahweh was king, regardless of the external matters in life.





Connecting Psalter in Postexilic Israel to Postmodernity

- ▢ Four Forms of the Psalms loosely similar to Wesley's "Means of Grace"
 - ▢ **Works of Piety**
 - ▢ Individual – reading, meditating, studying scripture, prayer, fasting, attend worship.....
 - ▢ Communal – share in the sacraments, Christian accountability, and Bible Study
 - ▢ **Works of Mercy**
 - ▢ Individual – doing good works, visiting the sick, visiting those in prison, feeding the hungry, generosity
 - ▢ Communal – seek justice, end oppression and discrimination, addressing needs of the poor



Connecting Psalter in Postexilic Israel to Postmodernity

- As we relate the phrase: “Yahweh was king, regardless of the external matters in life,” what does this say to us today?
- The songs and hymns we sing today can bring us closer to God – and not just the ones written in a Christian genre.
- The songs we sing remind us of the goodness of God, and the response we seek when we look to God for answers and wisdom
- The songs we hear and sing can have spiritual meaning, if we look to them in our identity as children of God



Carry on my wayward
son
There'll be peace when
you are done
Lay your weary head to
rest
Don't you cry no more