

# PSALMS

## Study Guide

**NOTE:** Due to the amount of material in Psalms, **this study is designed to be split into two** discussion sessions: **1) Psalms 1-89 and 2) Psalms 90-150.** The observation words and summary questions are appropriate for both sessions. You may need multiple copies of the Observation Sheets (end of the study) or you may write your observations in a separate notebook.

### AUTHOR

Psalms has more authors than any other book in the Bible. Therefore, the author is: Various!

- **David** wrote 75 psalms.
- **Asaph** (musical priest) wrote 12 psalms.
- **Sons of Korah** (association of singers/composers) wrote 10 psalms.
- **Moses**
- **Solomon**
- **Heman the Ezrahite**
- **Ethan the Ezrahite**
- **Anonymous** – 50 psalms are unknown, but Ezra may have written some of them.

### DATE

The overall time of writing is extensive, for the book of Psalms is actually a collection of individual poems and hymns collected over the years and later assembled. The poems themselves were written from the time of the exodus (approx. 1450 B.C.) through the return from Babylonian exile (approx. 450 B.C.), providing insight to the worship and religious thought over 1,000 years of Israel's history.

Smaller collections of the psalms are believed to have been assembled at key points in Israel's history.

- Reign of King David (1 Chron. 23:5)
- Reign of Hezekiah (2 Chron. 29:30)
- Leadership of Ezra & Nehemiah (Neh. 12:24, 26)

This collection process may explain why some psalms are so similar (e.g. Psalms 14 & 53). The full collection was edited several times before the final form we have now, which was translated into Greek with the rest of the Old Testament (Septuagint). This final form was established several centuries before Jesus' time.

## PSALMS TRIVIA

This book, also referred to as *The Psalter*, is called the *Tehillim* in Hebrew, meaning “praises.” The title “Psalms” came about from the Greek *psalmoi*, which means “words, or song of praise, accompanied by stringed instruments.” More fun facts:

- Psalms is the **largest book in the Bible** and perhaps the **most widely used**.
- **Psalm 118** is the center location of the whole Bible.
- **Psalm 119** is the longest chapter in the Bible & used by Jews to celebrate Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year). Each stanza within the poem begins with a consecutive letter of the Hebrew alphabet (acrostic). The Eastern Orthodox Church holds that King David used this psalm to teach Solomon both the Hebrew alphabet and the “alphabet of spiritual life.”
- Other psalms share the **acrostic pattern** of Psalm 119 where verses or groups of verses each begin with successive Hebrew letters (Ps. 9, 10, 25, 34, 27, 111, 112, 119, 145).
- The term, *Selah*, occurs more than 70 times in 39 different psalms. No one is certain what the exact purpose is, though the word means “to lift up” and may have been used as a musical signal or pause.

Psalms Chapter 119 תהלים	
א	אֲשֶׁר־יִמְכֹּר דְּרֹדֹ--
ב	אֲשֶׁר־יִצְרֵי עֲדָתוֹ ;
ג	אֲהֶ־לֹא־פָעִלוּ עֲוֹלָה ;
ד	אֲתָהּ־צִוִּיתָהּ פְּקֻדֹתֶיךָ--
ה	אֲחֵלִי־לִכְנוּ דְרָכֶיךָ--
ו	אֲזַל־לֹא־אֲבוֹשׁ-- בְּהַבֹּ
ז	אֲוֹדֶךָ־בִישֶׁר לִבְבִי--
ח	אֲתִּי־חֹקֶיךָ אֲשָׁמֵר ;
ט	בְּמִתְּנֵה זִכְרֹתֶיךָ־נֶעַר־אֶת־סִ
י	בְּכָל־לִבִּי דִרְשָׁתֶיךָ ;
יא	בְּלִבִּי־צִפְנֹתַי אֲמַרְתָּ
יב	בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה הַיְהוָה--
יג	בְּשִׁפְתַי סִפְרֹתֶיךָ-- כִּי
יד	בְּדַרְדַּר עֲדוּתֶיךָ שִׂשְׁתִּי
טו	בְּפִקּוּדֶיךָ אֲשִׁיחָה ;
טז	בְּחֻקֹתֶיךָ אֲשִׁתַּעֲשֶׂע ;
יז	גִּמְלַל עַל־עֲבֹדֶךָ אֲחִינָה ;
יח	גִּלְעֵינִי וְאֲבִיטָה--
יט	גֵּר אֲנִי בָאָרֶץ ;
כ	גִּרְסָה נַפְשִׁי לְתַאֲבָה--

## LITERARY STRUCTURE

Though many of the psalms were sung, the book itself is not a hymnal, but more of a prayer book in which some prayers are sung. Psalms holds a strong internal structure of smaller books ending with a doxology (liturgical form of praise) similar to: “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen.” (Ps. 41:13; 72:19-20; 89:52; 106:48). The 5<sup>th</sup> internal book does not have the standard doxology, but instead ends with 5 psalms of praise known as the “Hallel,” with each poem beginning and ending with “Praise the Lord,” the meaning of the Hebrew word *hallelujah*.

Some scholars point out the 5 internal books of Psalms reflects the Torah, the 5 books of Moses. Therefore, it’s possible the book of Psalms was designed to be a Torah of sorts for the purpose of worship and teaching.

	Prologue (1-2)	Book 1 (3-41)	Book 2 (42-72)	Book 3 (73-89)	Book 4 (90-106)	Book 5 (107-145)	Closing (146-150)
<b>Doxology</b>		41:13	72:18-19	89:52	106:48		
<b>Primary Author</b>	Anonymous	David	David & Sons of Korah	Asaph	Anonymous	David & Anonymous	Anonymous
<b>Basic Content</b>	Torah & Messiah	Worship & Call to Covenant Loyalty	Hymns of National Interest / Future Return to Temple & Future Reign of Messiah		Anthems of Praise / Messianic Kingdom vs. Downfall & Exile of David's Kingdom		Hallel <i>Praise the Lord!</i> The Lord Reigns as King
<b>Topical Likeness to Pentateuch</b>		<b>Genesis:</b> Man & Creation	<b>Exodus:</b> Deliverance & Redemption	<b>Leviticus:</b> Worship & Sanctuary	<b>Numbers:</b> Wilderness & Wandering	<b>Deuteronomy</b> : Scripture & Praise	

## PSALMS AS POETRY

There are as many categories of poetry in Psalms as there are scholars to categorize! Rather than include all possible forms, here are some key ones:

- **Lament** – prayers for God's deliverance (e.g. Ps. 3-7, 25-28, 140-143)
- **Thanksgiving** – praise for God's acts and blessings (e.g. Ps. 32-34, 103-106, 146-148)
- **Enthronement** – describing God's sovereign rule (e.g. Ps. 47, 93, 96-99)
- **Royal/Messianic** – describes the reign of the earthly king and Heavenly King (e.g. Ps. 2, 18, 20, 45, 110, 132)
- **Wisdom** – instruct in wisdom and righteousness (e.g. Ps. 1, 37, 119)
- **Imprecatory** – invoking God's wrath and judgment against enemies (e.g. Ps. 7, 35, 55, 137)

English poetry depends upon rhyme and rhythm, but Hebrew poetry is built upon parallelism and symmetry – the balancing of thoughts. The **first line states the theme**, with following line(s) developing that theme through the following kinds of parallelism:

- **Synonymous** – **echoing the idea of the first line**  
*"The earth is the Lord's and everything in it,  
the world, and all who live in it." (Ps. 24:1)*
- **Antithetic** – secondary line(s) **contrast the first line**  
*"For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish." (Ps. 1:6)*

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- **Synthetic** – further **expand the first line’s point**  
*“Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked,  
or stand in the way that sinners take,  
or sit in the company of mockers.” (Ps. 1:1)*
- **Emblematic** – lines **illustrate the thought, often through simile**  
*“As the deer pants for streams of water,  
so my soul pants for you, O God.” (Ps. 42:1)*



**Reading Tip** – In some cases, multiple numbered verses create the parallelism. As you read, pay attention to the first line of each numbered verse. You will pretty quickly be able to tell if this is building upon previous verses, or presenting a new thought.

### OBSERVATION WORDS

You’re used to looking for repeated words and themes in a book. However, when studying the ENTIRE book of Psalms, there are far too many options for observation words. Truly, there should be observation words for each and every psalm, for they each address specific topics. The sheer volume of Psalms requires a different approach.

**Attached are sheets for you to record what you learn AS YOU READ.**

- **God** – names, attributes, what He does/doesn’t do, etc.
- **Jesus** – standard types/foreshadowing (deliver, salvation, etc.)
- **Messianic** – clear pictures to Jesus as Messiah (Anointed One, Suffering Servant, Eternal King, etc.) – some of these may look like it’s referring to David, but fits Jesus as well
- **Holy Spirit** – named, works, symbols, etc.
- **Law/Commands/Precepts** – anything about God’s Word, Law, commands, etc.
- **Praise/Prayer** – different ways of worship described (shout, sing, sacrifice, etc.) and what you learn about praise & prayer
- **Instructions/Warnings** – life wisdom, instructions for worship, prayer, godliness, etc.

## SUMMARY QUESTIONS

1. What did the **Lord teach YOU** through what you read & how will you apply it in your life?
  
2. What do you learn about praise and prayer through this book?
  
3. Specifically, what does **Psalm 66** teach about praise and prayer?
  - What are various ways/forms of praise?
  - What things can we praise for?
  - How is praise/prayer impacted by sin?
  - How does this psalm encourage you in your prayer & praise life?

## **FOR PSALMS PART 2:**

- **Summary questions #1-2 for Psalms 90-150.**
- **Key Word** – How would you summarize what you've read into one word or very short phrase? Why did you choose that?
- **Key Verse(s) & Chapter** – May reflect something which stood out to you or helps summarize the book. So, what are they and why?

### OBSERVATION SHEET

GOD	JESUS	MESSIANIC DESCRIPTIONS <i>(include passage reference)</i>
		<b>HOLY SPIRIT</b>

### OBSERVATION SHEET

LAW/WORD/PRECEPTS	PRAISE/PRAYER	INSTRUCTIONS/WARNINGS