

Old Testament Wisdom Books

The wisdom books (which number five in the Protestant canon, seven if you include Apocryphal books) represent a major shift in style from the historical books that precede them. They fall into the category of Ancient Near East wisdom literature, a genre of writing that focuses on existential questions about God, humanity, Creation, and the nature of evil and suffering. Wisdom literature could take the form of short, memorable insights (as in the book of Proverbs) or a dialogue (as in the book of Job, where Job, Job's friends, and God engage in a conversation that teaches and enlightens the reader). Wisdom literature was produced in several different cultures in the Ancient Near East, but by far the best-known are those that found their way into the Bible canon: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs.

Here are the wisdom books of the Protestant Bible:

- **Job:** One of the most famous characters in the Bible, Job is the archetype of the "suffering saint"—a God-fearing man who experiences terrible trials and sufferings, and calls out to God for an explanation. The book does not offer an easy or simplistic answer to the problem of suffering, but finds solace in God's sovereignty. Famous passage: God's strongly-worded answer to Job in chapter 40.

How do you trust God even when life isn't fair and you suffer for no good reason? Job's story invites us to consider what it means that God runs the world by wisdom, and how this truth can bring peace in dark times. Job is the last of the three books that explore these themes of biblical wisdom.

- **Psalms:** An oft-quoted collection of prayers, songs, and poetry, many of them written by King David. The psalms cover almost the entirety of human emotion, including praise, doubt, repentance, and joy. Almost everyone who's read the Psalms can point to at least one or two that stood out as "favorites," but Psalm 23 ("The Lord is my shepherd...") is one of the most recognizable.
- **Proverbs:** What does a wisely-lived life look like? Through hundreds of short pieces of insight, the book of Proverbs distinguishes wisdom from foolishness. Like the other wisdom books, Proverbs employs several interesting rhetorical techniques, most notably parallelism, in which two phrases are matched or contrasted: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge / but fools despise wisdom and instruction."

This book is the accumulation of wisdom from generations of godly insightful people. It promotes a life of virtue and "fear of the Lord," so that you can truly experience the good life. Proverbs is one of the three books that explore these themes of biblical wisdom.

- **Ecclesiastes:** is a challenging book that can seem out-of-place in the Bible—it's an extended reflection on the meaning of life that sometimes feels fatalistic and cynical, as exemplified in its famous opening stanzas: "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless." Nevertheless, its message is ultimately the positive one that living in obedience to God provides grounding for human life.

In this book we hear the skeptical voice of "the teacher." He observes that living by the book of Proverbs doesn't always bring positive results. Sometimes life is hard and defies neat explanations.

How do you live with that tension, and still strive for wisdom? Ecclesiastes is the second of the three biblical wisdom books.

- **Song of Songs:** Another unique book, Song of Songs is a poetic dialogue about love, celebrating marriage and the gift of sexuality. Many Christians also find in it an allegorical message about the love of Christ for His church.

The wisdom books contain some of the most beautifully-written sections of the entire Bible, although they can be a challenge to read straight-through in the way one might approach the clear narratives of the Bible's historical books. While many books of the Old Testament give us a historian's view of God's people and their experiences, the wisdom books provide us with a more pastoral glimpse at the state of their hearts. We see that despite the gap of time that separates us from ancient Israel, the Israelites grappled with the same faith issues that we do today: they asked tough questions about sin and suffering; they experienced joy and confidence in God's love; they looked for God in life's pleasures and trials alike; they sometimes entertained doubts and they looked to God for help both physical and spiritual.

Beyond that, the wisdom books show us that God values and responds to these myriad questions and prayers. We can take comfort that no experience in our lives, whether wonderful or terrible, can place us outside the love and understanding of a gracious God.

Psalms

The genre of Psalms is Songs and Poetry of all kinds. It is written by multiple authors; David wrote 73, Asaph wrote 12, the sons of Korah wrote 9, Solomon wrote 3, Ethan, and Moses each wrote one (Ps. 90), and 51 of the Psalms are anonymous. They were written over the span of approximately 900 years (Beginning at the time of Moses 1440 B.C. and through the captivity in 586 B.C.).

The Psalms include praises of joy, laments, blessings, and thanksgivings. They are directed at God and they help us to express and communicate ourselves to Him. We read about the Psalmist's emotions from one extreme to another, from praising, delighting in and worshiping God with fervor, to repentance and crying out to Him in despair.

Psalms sits at the very center of the Bible. The major themes found in Psalms are Praise, God's Power, Forgiveness, Thankfulness and Trust. "My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD, and all flesh will bless His holy name forever and ever" (145:21).

- The book of Psalms was originally divided into five books: o Book 1 consisted of chapters 1-41. o Book 2 corresponds to chapters 42-72. o Book 3 is chapters 73-89. o Book 4 included chapters 90-106. o Book 5 is compiled with chapters 107-150.

Mainly, the Psalms were written to help us deliver praise to God who is worthy of such. As psalms 150:6 reads, "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord."

How do we know what God wants for us in our lives? "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (119:105). The answer is found in reading His Word, studying it, and applying its unchanging truths to your life.

Overview

A psalm is a religious poem or song set to music. Some of the psalms in the Book of Psalms are hymns to be sung by a congregation, and "Songs of Ascent" to be sung by pilgrims approaching the Temple. Some are private prayers, and some are lyrical devices for recalling historical events in Israel's history. In its current form, the Book of Psalms contains one hundred and fifty individual psalms, although this number may vary in different biblical translations.

Traditionally, the psalms are separated into five books, and many poems are further distinguished by brief titles attributing the given work to a specific author, though these titles were probably added at a later date by an editor or group of editors of the psalms; the authorship of the psalms is uncertain at best. Because the subject matter of the psalms ranges from the events of King David's dynasty to the exile of the Israelites in Babylon, the poems may have been composed anywhere from the tenth century b.c. to the sixth century b.c. or later.

Many of the psalms rehearse episodes of Israel's history, especially the story of Israel's exodus from Egypt and its arrival in the promised land. Psalm 137 is a beautiful lament of the early days of Israel's captivity in Babylon. The poem opens with the image of the Israelites weeping by the banks of the Babylonian rivers, longing for Jerusalem, or Zion. When their captors ask the Israelites to sing for them, the Israelites refuse, hanging their harps on the branches of the willow trees. The poet asks, "How could we sing the Lord's / song / in a foreign land?" (137:4). The poem ends with a call for vengeance on the Babylonians. It acts as an earnest reminder both to the exiled Israelites and to later biblical readers of the importance of the promised land for the celebration of the Jewish faith.

Types of Psalms

A majority of the biblical psalms are devoted to expressing praise or thanksgiving to God. Psalm 8, for instance, is a communal or public declaration of praise to God for his relationship with creation. The poet praises God for his command over each level of creation, beginning with the cosmos, then descending gradually to humankind, the animals, and, lastly, the sea. The speaker expresses amazement that God, who is above the heavens, not only concerns himself with the welfare of humans but places humans directly beneath himself in importance, granting them authority over the rest of creation, which is "under their feet" (8:6). Poems such as Psalm 46 praise "the city of God" or "Zion" for being God's home, and many of the psalms suggest a grand entrance to Jerusalem, such as Psalm 100: "Enter his gates with thanksgiving, / and his courts with praise" (100:4). Similarly, when the speaker says in Psalm 121, "I lift my eyes to the hills," the poem conveys the expectation and longing of the Jewish worshipper as he approaches the Temple in Jerusalem (121:1).

Another category of psalms includes laments or supplications, poems in which the author requests relief from his physical suffering and his enemies. These enemies may be actual, such as opposing nations or public accusers, or they may be figurative depictions of an encroaching spiritual evil. In Psalm 22, the speaker characterizes the band of nondescript evildoers that trouble the poet as a series of approaching ravenous animals—first bulls, then roaring lions, and then dogs. The evildoers surround the speaker,

staring at and gloating over his now shriveled and emaciated body, finally stripping him of his clothes. In verse nineteen, the speaker cries for God's relief, and God proceeds to deliver him from each of the three beasts in reverse order—first from the dog, then from the lion, and finally from the wild oxen. God's sudden rescue complete, the psalm of lament becomes a psalm of thanksgiving as the speaker vows to announce God's praises to all of Israel.

Supplication and lament are integral parts of another type of psalm, in which the poet moves from despair over his own wrongdoing to a profession of deeper faith in God. These are some of the most beloved psalms, for they are deeply personal poems that offer hope of redemption for the individual. The poet decries his spiritual despair using metaphors similar to the psalms of lament. In Psalm 40, the poet is stuck in a "desolate / pit" and a "miry bog" until God sets him "upon a rock" (40:2). The poet walks through dark valleys in Psalm 23, his body wastes away in Psalm 32, and his bones are crushed in Psalm 51. God relieves the poet by acting as a "refuge," a "strong fortress," and a "hiding place" (31:2, 32:7).

Who wrote the book?

Psalms, a collection of lyrical poems, is one of only two Old Testament books to identify itself as a composite work containing multiple authors (Proverbs is the other). Some psalms name their author in the first line or title. For example, Moses wrote Psalm 90. David was responsible for many of them, composing seventy-three psalms. Asaph wrote twelve; the descendants of Korah penned ten. Solomon wrote one or two, and Ethan and Heman the Ezrahites were responsible for two others. The remainder of the psalms does not contain information about their authors.

The book was originally titled *Tehillim* which means "praise songs" in Hebrew. The English title of "Psalms" originated from the Septuagint's Greek title *Psalmoi* also meaning "songs of praise."

Where are we?

Individual psalms were written as far back in history as Moses's time, through the time of David, Asaph, and Solomon, to the time of the Ezrahites who most likely lived after the Babylonian captivity, meaning the writing of the book spans one thousand years. Some of the psalms attributed to David have additional notations connecting them with documented events in his life (for example, Psalm 59 is linked with 1 Samuel 19:11; Psalm 56 is connected with 1 Samuel 21:10–15; Psalm 34 is associated with 1 Samuel 21:10–22:2; and Psalm 52 is linked with 1 Samuel 22:9).

The psalms are organized into five books or collections. They were probably collected gradually, as corporate worship forms developed along with temple worship. It is likely that by the time of Ezra, the books of the Psalter were organized into their final form. Each section concludes with a doxology, with the entire Psalter capped by Psalm 150, a grand doxology.

Why is Psalms so important?

The psalms comprised the ancient hymnal of God's people. The poetry was often set to music—but not always. The psalms express the emotion of the individual poet to God or about God. Different types of psalms were written to communicate different feelings and thoughts regarding a psalmist's situation.

Psalms of lament express the author's offering of direct admiration to God. Psalms of praise, also called hymns, portray the author's offering of direct admiration to God. Thanksgiving psalms usually reflect the author's gratitude for a personal deliverance or provision from God. Pilgrim psalms include the title "a song of ascent" and were used on pilgrimages "going up" to Jerusalem for three annual festivals. Other types of psalms are referred to today as wisdom psalms, royal psalms (referring to Israel's king or Israel's Messiah), victory psalms, Law psalms, and songs of Zion.

The psalms include unique Hebrew terms. The word *Selah*, found seventy-one times, is most likely a musical notation added by worship leaders after the Israelites incorporated the psalm into public worship. Scholars do not know the meaning of *maskil*, found in thirteen psalms. Occasionally, a psalm appears with instructions for the song leader. For example, we see instructions such as "For the director of music" (occurring in fifty-five psalms [NIV]); "To the tune of 'Lilies'" (similar references found in Psalms 45, 60, 69, 80 NIV); "To the tune of 'The Doe of the Morning'" (Psalm 22 NIV); "To the tune of 'Do Not Destroy'" (Psalms 57-59, 75 NIV). These and others can refer to melodies used with the given psalm or perhaps to suggestions for liturgical use.

What's the big idea?

The book of Psalms expresses worship. Throughout its many pages, Psalms encourages its readers to praise God for who He is and what He has done. The Psalms illuminate the greatness of our God, affirm His faithfulness to us in times of trouble, and remind us of the absolute centrality of His Word. As the Psalms present a clear picture of God lovingly guiding His people, the responses of praise and worship to God are never far from the psalmists' pens. The portrayal of worship in the Psalms offers us glimpse after glimpse of hearts devoted to God, individuals repentant before Him, and lives changed through encounters with Him.

Psalm types

Hebrew superscriptions to the Psalms acquaint us with an ancient system of classification:

(1) *mizmor* ("psalm"); (2) *shiggaion* (see note on Ps 7 title); (3) *miktam* (see note on Ps 16 title); (4) *shir* ("song"); (5) *masvkil* (see note on Ps 32 title); (6) *tephillah* ("prayer"); (7) *tehillah* ("praise"); (8) *lehzakir* ("for being remembered"—i.e., before God, a petition); (9) *letodah* ("for praising" or "for giving thanks"); (10) *lelammed* ("for teaching"); and (11) *shir yedidot* ("song of loves"—i.e., a wedding song). The meaning of many of these terms, however, is uncertain. In addition, some titles contain two of these (especially *mizmor* and *shir*), indicating that the types are diversely based and overlapping.

Analysis of content has given rise to a different classification that has proven useful for study of the Psalms. The main types that can be identified are: (1) prayers of the individual (e.g., Ps 3-7); (2) praise from the individual for God's saving help (e.g., Ps 30; 34); (3) prayers of the community (e.g., Ps 12; 44; 79); (4) praise from the community for God's saving help (e.g., Ps 66; 75); (5) confessions of confidence in the Lord (e.g., Ps 11; 16; 52); (6) hymns in praise of God's majesty and virtues (e.g., Ps 8; 19; 29; 65); (7) hymns celebrating God's universal reign (Ps 47; 93-99); (8) songs of Zion, the city of God (Ps 46; 48; 76; 84; 122; 126; 129; 137); (9) royal psalms—by, for or concerning the king, the Lord's anointed (e.g., Ps 2; 18; 20; 45; 72; 89; 110); (10) pilgrimage songs (Ps 120-134); (11) liturgical songs (e.g., Ps 15; 24; 68); (12) didactic (instructional) songs (e.g., Ps 1; 34; 37; 73; 112; 119; 128; 133).

This classification also involves some overlapping. For example, "prayers of the individual" may include prayers of the king (in his special capacity as king) or even prayers of the community speaking in the collective first person singular. Nevertheless, it is helpful to study a psalm in conjunction with others of the same type. Attempts to fix specific liturgical settings for each type have not been very convincing. For those psalms about which something can be said in this regard see introductions to the individual psalms.

Of all these psalm types, the prayers (both of the individual and of the community) are the most complex. Several speech functions are combined to form these appeals to God: (1) address to God: "O Lord," "my God," "my deliverer"; (2) initial appeal: "Arise," "Answer me," "Help," "Save me"; (3) description of distress: "Many are rising against me," "The wicked attack," "I am in distress"; (4) complaint against God: "Why have you forsaken me?" "How long will you hide your face from me?"; (5) petition: "Be not far from me," "Vindicate me"; (6) motivation for God to hear: "for I take refuge in you," "for your name's sake"; (7) accusation against the adversary: "There is no truth in their mouths," "Ruthless men seek my life" ("the wicked" are often quoted); (8) call for judicial redress: "Let them be put to shame," "Call him to account for his wickedness"; (9) claims of innocence: "I have walked in my integrity," "They hate me without cause"; (10) confessions of sin: "I have sinned against you," "I confess my iniquity"; (11) professions of trust: "You are a shield about me," "You will answer me"; (12) vows to praise for deliverance: "I will sing your might," "My lips will praise you"; (13) calls to praise: "Magnify the Lord with me," "Sing praise to the Lord"; (14) motivations for praise: "for you have delivered me," "for the Lord hears the needy."

Though not all these appear in every prayer, they all belong to the conventions of prayer in the Psalter, with petition itself being but one (usually brief) element among the rest. On the whole they reflect the then-current conventions of a court trial, the psalmists presenting their cases before the heavenly King/Judge. When beset by wicked adversaries, the petitioners appeal to God for a hearing, describe their situation, plead their innocence ("righteousness"), lodge their accusations against their adversaries, and appeal for deliverance and judicial redress. When suffering at the hands of God (when God is their adversary), they confess their guilt and plead for mercy. Attention to these various speech functions and their role in the psalmists' judicial appeals to the heavenly Judge will significantly aid the reader's understanding of these psalms.

It should be noted that reference to "penitential" and "imprecatory" psalms as distinct psalm "types" has no basis in the Psalter collection itself. The former ("penitential") refers to an early Christian selection of seven psalms (6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143) for liturgical expressions of penitence; the latter ("imprecatory") is based on a misconstrual of one of the speech functions found in the prayers. What are actually appeals to the heavenly Judge for judicial redress (function 8 noted above) are taken to be curses ("imprecation" means "curse") pronounced by the psalmists on their adversaries. See note on 5:10.

Theology: Introduction

The Psalter is for the most part a book of prayer and praise. In it faith speaks to God in prayer and of God in praise. But there are also psalms that are explicitly didactic (instructional) in form and purpose (teaching the way of godliness). As noted above (Collection, Arrangement and Date), the manner in which the whole collection has been arranged suggests that one of its main purposes was instruction in

the life of faith, a faith formed and nurtured by the Law, the Prophets and the canonical wisdom literature. Accordingly, the Psalter is theologically rich. Its theology is, however, not abstract or systematic but doxological, confessional and practical. So a summation of that "theology" impoverishes it by translating it into an objective mode.

Furthermore, any summation faces a still greater problem. The Psalter is a large collection of independent pieces of many kinds, serving different purposes and composed over the course of many centuries. Not only must a brief summary of its "theology" be selective and incomplete; it will also of necessity be somewhat artificial. It will suggest that each psalm reflects or at least presupposes the "theology" outlined, that there is no "theological" tension or progression within the Psalter. Manifestly this is not so.

Still, the final editors of the Psalter were obviously not eclectic in their selection. They knew that many voices from many times spoke here, but none that in their judgment was incompatible with the Law and the Prophets. No doubt they also assumed that each psalm was to be understood in the light of the collection as a whole. That assumption we may share. Hence something, after all, can be said concerning seven major theological themes that, while admittedly a bit artificial, need not seriously distort and can be helpful to the student of the Psalms.

Theology: Major Themes

1. At the core of the theology of the Psalter is the conviction that the gravitational center of life (of right human understanding, trust, hope, service, morality, adoration), but also of history and of the whole creation (heaven and earth), is *God* (Yahweh, "the Lord"; see *Dt 6:4* and note). He is *the Great King* over all, the One to whom all things are subject. He created all things and preserves them; they are the robe of glory with which he has clothed himself. Because he ordered them, they have a well-defined and "true" identity (no chaos there). Because he maintains them, they are sustained and kept secure from disruption, confusion or annihilation. Because he alone is the sovereign God, they are governed by one hand and held in the service of one divine purpose. Under God creation is a cosmos—an orderly and systematic whole. What we distinguish as "nature" and history had for the psalmists one Lord, under whose rule all things worked together. Through the creation the Great King's majestic glory is displayed. He is good (wise, righteous, faithful, amazingly benevolent and merciful—evoking trust), and he is great (his knowledge, thoughts and works are beyond human comprehension—evoking reverent awe). By his good and lordly rule he is shown to be the Holy One.
2. As the Great King by right of creation and enduring absolute sovereignty, *he ultimately will not tolerate any worldly power that opposes or denies or ignores him*. He will come to rule the nations so that all will be compelled to acknowledge him. This expectation is no doubt the root and broadest scope of the psalmists' long view of the future. Because the Lord is the Great King beyond all challenge, *his righteous and peaceable kingdom will come, overwhelming all*

opposition and purging the creation of all rebellion against his rule—such will be the ultimate outcome of history.

3. As the Great King on whom all creatures depend, *he opposes the "proud," those who rely on their own resources (and/or the gods they have contrived) to work out their own destiny*. These are the ones who ruthlessly wield whatever power they possess to attain worldly wealth, status and security; who are a law to themselves and exploit others as they will. In the Psalter, this kind of "pride" is the root of all evil. Those who embrace it, though they may seem to prosper, will be brought down to death, their final end. The "humble," the "poor and needy," those who acknowledge their dependence on the Lord in all things—these are the ones in whom God delights. Hence the "fear of the Lord"—i.e., humble trust in and obedience to the Lord—is the "beginning" of all wisdom (*111:10*). Ultimately, those who embrace it will inherit the earth. Not even death can hinder their seeing the face of God. The psalmists' hope for the future—the future of God and his kingdom and the future of the godly—was firm, though somewhat generalized. None of the psalmists gives expression to a two-age vision of the future (the present evil age giving way to a new age of righteousness and peace on the other side of a great eschatological divide). Such a view began to appear in the intertestamental literature—a view that had been foreshadowed by Daniel (see especially *12:2-3*) and by Isaiah (see *65:17-25; 66:22-24*)—and it later received full expression in the teaching of Jesus and the apostles. But this revelation was only a fuller development consistent with the hopes the psalmists lived by.
4. Because God is the Great King, *he is the ultimate Executor of justice among humans (to avenge oneself is an act of the "proud")*. God is the court of appeal when persons are threatened or wronged—especially when no earthly court that he has established has jurisdiction (as in the case of international conflicts) or is able to judge (as when one is wronged by public slander) or is willing to act (out of fear or corruption). *He is the mighty and faithful Defender of the defenseless and the wronged*. He knows every deed and the secrets of every heart. There is no escaping his scrutiny. No false testimony will mislead him in judgment. And he hears the pleas brought to him. As the good and faithful Judge, he delivers those who are oppressed or wrongfully attacked and redresses the wrongs committed against them (see note on *5:10*). This is the unwavering conviction that accounts for the psalmists' impatient complaints when they boldly, yet as "poor and needy," cry to him, "Why, O Lord, (have you not yet delivered me)?" "How long, O Lord (before you act)?"
5. As the Great King over all the earth, *the Lord has chosen Israel to be his servant people, his "inheritance" among the nations*. He has delivered them by mighty acts out of the hands of the

world powers, he has given them a land of their own (territory that he took from other nations to be his own "inheritance" in the earth), and he has united them with himself in covenant as the initial embodiment of his redeemed kingdom. Thus both their destiny and his honor came to be bound up with this relationship. To them he also gave his word of revelation, which testified of him, made specific his promises and proclaimed his will. By God's covenant, Israel was to live among the nations, loyal only to her heavenly King. She was to trust solely in his protection, hope in his promises, live in accordance with his will and worship him exclusively. She was to sing his praises to the whole world—which in a special sense revealed Israel's anticipatory role in the evangelization of the nations.

6. As the Great King, Israel's covenant Lord, *God chose David to be his royal representative on earth*. In this capacity, David was the Lord's "servant"—i.e., a member of the Great King's administration. The Lord himself anointed him and adopted him as his royal "son" to rule in his name. Through him God made his people secure in the promised land and subdued all the powers that threatened them. What is more, *he covenanted to preserve the Davidic dynasty*. Henceforth the kingdom of God on earth, while not dependent on the house of David, was linked to it by God's decision and commitment. In its continuity and strength lay Israel's security and hope as she faced a hostile world. And since the Davidic kings were God's royal representatives in the earth, in concept seated at God's right hand (110:1), the scope of their rule was potentially worldwide (see Ps 2).

The Lord's anointed, however, was more than a warrior king. He was to be endowed by God to govern his people with godlike righteousness: to deliver the oppressed, defend the defenseless, suppress the wicked, and thus bless the nation with internal peace and prosperity. He was also an intercessor with God in behalf of the nation, the builder and maintainer of the temple (as God's earthly palace and the nation's house of prayer) and the foremost voice calling the nation to worship the Lord. It is perhaps with a view to these last duties that he is declared to be not only king, but also "priest" (see Ps 110 and notes).

7. As the Great King, Israel's covenant Lord, *God* (who had chosen David and his dynasty to be his royal representatives) *also chose Jerusalem (the City of David) as his own royal city, the earthly seat of his throne. Thus Jerusalem (Zion) became the earthly capital (and symbol) of the kingdom of God. There in his palace (the temple) he sat enthroned among his people.* There his people could meet with him to bring their prayers and praise, and to see his power and glory. From there he brought salvation, dispensed blessings and judged the nations. And with him as the city's great Defender, Jerusalem was the secure citadel of the kingdom of God, the hope and joy of God's people.

God's goodwill and faithfulness toward his people were most strikingly symbolized by his pledged presence among them at his temple in Jerusalem, the "city of the Great King" (48:2). But no manifestation of his benevolence was greater than his readiness to forgive the sins of those who humbly confessed them and whose hearts showed him that their repentance was genuine and that their professions of loyalty to him had integrity. As they anguished over their own sinfulness, the psalmists remembered the ancient testimony of their covenant Lord: I am Yahweh ("the Lord"), "the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin" (Ex 34:6-7). Only so did they dare to submit to him as his people, to "fear" him (see 130:3-4).

Theology: Summary, Messianic Import and Conclusion

Unquestionably the supreme kingship of Yahweh (in which he displays his transcendent greatness and goodness) is the most basic metaphor and most pervasive theological concept in the Psalter—as in the OT generally. It provides the fundamental perspective in which people are to view themselves, the whole creation, events in "nature" and history, and the future. All creation is Yahweh's one kingdom. To be a creature in the world is to be a part of his kingdom and under his rule. To be a human being in the world is to be dependent on and responsible to him. To proudly deny that fact is the root of all wickedness—the wickedness that now pervades the world.

God's election of Israel and subsequently of David and Zion, together with the giving of his word, represent the renewed inbreaking of God's righteous kingdom into this world of rebellion and evil. It initiates the great divide between the righteous nation and the wicked nations, and on a deeper level between the righteous and the wicked, a more significant distinction that cuts even through Israel. In the end this divine enterprise will triumph. Human pride will be humbled, and wrongs will be redressed. The humble will be given the whole earth to possess, and the righteous and peaceable kingdom of God will come to full realization. These theological themes, of course, have profound religious and moral implications. Of these, too, the psalmists spoke.

One question that ought yet to be addressed is: Do the Psalms speak of the Christ? Yes, in a variety of ways—but not as the prophets do. The Psalter was never numbered among the "prophetic" books. On the other hand, when the Psalter was being given its final form, what the psalms said about the Lord and his ways with his people, about the Lord and his ways with the nations, about the Lord and his ways with the righteous and the wicked, and what the psalmists said about the Lord's anointed, his temple and his holy city—all this was understood in light of the prophetic literature (both Former and Latter Prophets). Relative to these matters, the Psalter and the Prophets were mutually reinforcing and interpretive.

When the Psalms speak of the king on David's throne, they speak of the king who is being crowned (as in Ps 2; 72; 110—though some think 110 is an exception) or is reigning (as in Ps 45) at the time. They proclaim his status as the Lord's anointed and declare what the Lord will accomplish through him and his dynasty. Thus they also speak of the sons of David to come—and in the exile and the postexilic period when there was no reigning king, they spoke to Israel only of the great Son of David whom the prop-

had announced as the one in whom God's covenant with David would yet be fulfilled. So the NT quotes these psalms as testimonies to Christ, which in their unique way they are. In him they are truly fulfilled.

When in the Psalms righteous sufferers—who are "righteous" because they are innocent, not having provoked or wronged their adversaries, and because they are among the "humble" who trust in the Lord—cry out to God in their distress (as in Ps 22: 69), they give voice to the sufferings of God's servants in a hostile and evil world.

These cries became the prayers of God's oppressed "saints," and as such they were taken up into Israel's book of prayers. When Christ came in the flesh, he identified himself with God's "humble" people in the world. He became for them God's righteous servant par excellence, and he shared their sufferings at the hands of the wicked. Thus these prayers became his prayers also—uniquely his prayers. In him the suffering and deliverance of which these prayers speak are fulfilled (though they continue to be the prayers also of those who take up their cross and follow him).

Similarly, in speaking of God's covenant people, of the city of God, and of the temple in which God dwells, the Psalms ultimately speak of Christ's church. The Psalter is not only the prayer book of the second temple; it is also the enduring prayer book of the people of God. Now, however, it must be used in the light of the new era of redemption that dawned with the first coming of the Messiah and that will be consummated at his second coming.

Book 2 of Psalms

This second book of psalms (Psalms 42-72) has a few unique features. First, it is the only book of the five that contains psalms ascribed to the sons of Korah, a group of Levite temple singers. Second, it uses two rather obscure Hebrew terms in the superscriptions of almost half of these psalms. *Maskil*, which may be related to contemplation, is translated "contemplative poem" or "song" (42; 44-45; 52-55) and *miktam*, whose meaning is unclear, is translated "a prayer" (56-60). Third, in referring to God this second book shows a preference for the word "God" over the name "the Eternal One" that appears as "YHWH" in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Throughout the Bible, the creator and covenant God is referred to in many ways. Generally speaking, the names and titles used indicate something of His character and nature. The title "God" implies His unique majesty and power; no one is like Him. The name, translated "The Eternal One" and also "The Eternal," is God's covenant name revealed uniquely to Israel. As the translation suggests, the divine name implies that the one True God transcends time and yet He is "with" His people.

The poster child for the book is an unlikely group • Instead of opposing God's holiness, like Korah, they became musical bouncers in the temple, writing Psalms of deliverance, singing to those who enter. • The 'Sons of Korah' may have belonged in the grave, but were delivered and their songs reflect that.

Characters named in the book • There is a group of Psalms by the Levites named Korah • They hand off to another Levite of Korah named Asaph (who sings one Psalm) Asaph was selected by David to lead a group of levites to sing an minister before the Ark when it was moved to Mount Zion before the temple was built. Asaph has 1 Psalm in book 2 and 12 Psalms in book 3. • Then David begins and continues • Like the Books 1 and 3 there will be one Psalm dedicated to Jeduthan the choir master, Psalm 62 • The final Psalm is one of the two 'Psalms of Solomon' (72 and 127)

The sons of Korah will sing 8 songs • They will express discouragement, disappointment, needs and a crisis of faith (Even as they 'lead people in procession of worship') • Their song's will start with laments (especially the first three Psalms) and the last five will be more victorious. • The final Psalm will be on the need for deliverance from death and part of a larger set of five to follow (more on that later).

A longing... • Psalm 42 – As the deer pants for you so my soul pants for you. Although worship leaders, the son's of Korah have struggles, depression and questions • Psalm 43 – Vindicate me. And although worship leaders their struggles include prayers of vindication. (both of these end: – Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.)

A paradox, a crisis of faith... • Psalm 44 - The Sons of Korah sing of how they heard rightly about God and what he has done but God humiliated them and turned them over for persecution 'for His name's sake' – And so the cries and longings in Psalm 42, 43, 44 reach a crisis of disappointment here. – And then, quickly moved to more of a tone of triumph in 45 on

Worship in a minor key • Where the Lord leads me in pastures 'for His names sake in Psalm 23, in Psalm 44 we are led to be persecuted also for 'His names sake' (and quoted as so in Romans 8 even side by side with 'we are more than conquerors') • Deliverance doesn't preclude struggles with difficulties, ongoing, depression or persecution but resolution and hope if found in God.

A wedding Psalm (or two) pointing to Christ • Psalm 45 is a wedding Psalm of a Jewish King who marries and an unnamed gentile bride (quoted in Hebrews as part of an argument that Jesus is better than the angels) – Psalms 45:6-7 quoted in Hebrews 1:8-9 • Psalm 46 is the Psalm that the Psalm 'A Mighty Fortress is Our God' is based on and may be a response of the maidens to the previous, having 'Alamoth' in the title which may mean maidens

And the songs of the Son's of Korah rise in triumph and address the whole earth • Psalm 47 - Clap your hands all people – 'God is the king of all the earth' • Psalm 48 - Great is the Lord and the princes of all the people will gather as the people of Abraham (psalm 48 echoes the Alamoth women's chorus a few Psalms back with 'let the daughters of zion rejoice') • Psalm 49 - As a final Psalm the son's of Korah sing to the whole world, low, high, rich, poor, young, old about the need for redemption (and it will span five psalms as they hand the baton to Asaph and he to David on the same subject) – 'Why should I fear in times of trouble, when the iniquity of those who cheat me surrounds me.'

And another character introduced, Asaph. Who's he? (or who are they) • The ark was 'on the move' • It was in Shiloh in the tabernacle made in the time of Moses until it was used in battle and taken in battle by the Philistines • After the returned from unbelieving Gath it was moved (poetically believing Gath) to Obed Edom the Gittite • Then moved by David to Mount Zion until the temple would be built • And Asaph (called a seer) would be in charge of a group of Levites to sing and minister before the Ark on Mount Zion (Note that there are also a group of Psalms of Asaph in Book 3 and they may or may not be the same Asaph. Asaph was a seer so these are events future to the time of the Asaph in David's day and a seer could write of them but there was also an Asaph in Isaiah's day and an Asaph after the Babylonian exile, as well as the group of levite Asaph led. Any of these could have written the Psalms of Book 3 that are 'of Asaph')

A big handoff, and an expansive return of Psalm 14 with five psalms dealing with judgment and possible deliverance:

David will sing five psalms of salvation and mercy... • Psalm 54 - Save me • Psalm 55 - God has saved me – 'cast your burdens on the Lord... – Yet not everyone, for 'He will cast you down' referring to bloodthirsty and violent men' • Psalm 56 - Be gracious to me • Psalm 57 - Be merciful to me

David sings three songs to a strange tune 'do not destroy' • Psalm 57, 58, 59 are to the tune 'do not destroy' – David would not harm Saul but his mercy was not reciprocated and he turns to God for mercy – David also showed mercy to Absalom in telling his men not to hurt his son Absalom where Absalom was pleased to try and kill David – Likewise David did accepted unjust criticism and curses from Cush In all these cases he looked for God to be merciful where Saul, Absalom, Cush and whoever else was not merciful

And two songs born of rejection... • Psalm 60 - You rejected us • Psalm 61 - Hear my cry

Psalm 62, a song dedicated to Jeduthan the choir master • Psalm 62 - Once again, like the deer in Psalm 42, the singer thirsts longing for God – God is great and God is Good (Jeduthan's Psalms were 39, 62, 77 and possibly 89 if Spurgeon is right that Ethan is another form of Jeduthan)

And five songs of mercy • Psalm 63 - My soul thirsts for you • Psalm 64 - Hide me from the wicked • Psalm 65 - Praise is due you • Psalm 66 - Shout for joy all the earth • Psalm 67 - God is gracious to me • Psalm 68 - Let God arise and His enemies be scattered – Psalms 68:18 Ephesians 4:8

Psalm 67: The benediction at the start not end • The psalm starts with a Aaronic priestly benediction usually at the end of worship • In this case the Psalm picks up with the benediction and continues. 67 May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine on us— 2 so that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.

And songs of a trespass offering • Psalm 69 – there is a trespass offering More in number than the hairs of my head are those who hate me without cause; mighty are those who would destroy me, those who attack me with lies. What I did not steal must I now restore? This Psalm is heavily quoted in the New Testament. – Psalms 69:4 quoted in John 15:25 – Psalms 69:9 quoted in John 2:17, Romans 15:3 – Psalms 69:21 quoted in Matthew 27:34, John 19:28-29 – Psalms 69:22-23 quoted in Romans 11:9-10 – Psalms 69:25 quoted in Acts 1:20 • Psalm 70 - the singer's life is being sought • Psalm 71 – his enemies see no hope from God in his circumstances (he saved others but he cannot save himself) For my enemies speak concerning me; those who watch for my life consult together and say, "God has forsaken him; pursue and seize him, for there is none to deliver him."

And a big 'eschatological' finish • The long lasting sun and moon are witness to the enduring reign of Solomon • He will give justice to the poor • He will have dominion from sea to sea • The land will be so blessed there will be 'amber waves of grain' (even on the mountain tops where nothing grows) • Poetically so with Solomon, literally so in Jesus, the 'more than Solomon' • May people be blessed in him, all nations call him blessed! Amen and Amen! And 'thus ends the prayers of David, son of Jesse' (not emphasizing the King of Israel but the kid from Bethlehem. Here his hopes will be fulfilled.)

Psalm 42

To the chief Musician, Maschil, for the sons of Korah.

Perhaps this psalm was composed by David, when the unnatural rebellion of Absalom had forced him from the sanctuary of God, and to take up his lodging eastward of Jordan, 2 Sam. 15:13-19. We have in it, (1.) Ardent longings after nearness to and familiar intimacy with God, in his public ordinances and sanctuary: ver. 1-2. (2.) Mournful lamentations and bitter groanings on account of God's withdrawing his comfortable smiles; of the want of the once-enjoyed ordinances of God, and fellowship with his saints; of the depressing impressions of God's wrath; and of his enemies' insolent upbraiding of him on account of the departure and distance of his God, ver. 3-4, 6-7, 9-10. (3.) Believing remembrance of God's former favors, ver. 6; and self-encouraging hopes of future ones, ver. 5, 8, 11.

Have I experimentally understood all these things? My soul let me charge thee to beware of dissimulation with God, and of compassing him about with lies, under pretence of praising him. Dare not to sing these lines without inward, without ardent longings for the Lord; without earnest claiming of him as thy own God, upon the foundation of his new-covenant grant of himself to me in the gospel; without assured hopes of his future, his everlasting kindness to me-ward.

Psalm 43

This psalm was probably composed on the same occasion as the former; and contains, (1.) David's strong cries to his God for help against and deliverance from, his ungodly, unjust, and crafty oppressors, ver. 1-2. (2.) His earnest longings to be restored to the enjoyment of his God in his public ordinances, ver. 3-4. (3.) His inward disquiets composed by believing claims, of God as his God, and firm dependence on his promises, ver. 5.

While I sing, let my soul be deeply affected with the injuries I daily receive from Satan and my own lusts. Let my heart and flesh cry out for God, the living God, as my God, and mine exceeding joy. And let me still all the tumults of my heart with this that he is my God and my all; my God that doth me save.

Psalm 44

To the chief Musician for the sons of Korah, Maschil.

This psalm was perhaps composed on the same occasion as the 60th, and may have a prophetic view to the after distresses of the Jews in the time of Rehoboam, 2 Chron. 12; of Jehoram, 2 Chron. 21; of Ahaz, 2 Chron. 28; of Hezekiah, 2 Kings 18-19; and during the Chaldean captivity, Syro-Grecian oppression, etc.; and all these as typical of the distresses of the gospel church under heathens and Anti-Christians. It relates chiefly to the church, and contains, (1.) Thankful acknowledgments of what the Lord had done for her in former periods, as her God, her king, her joy, her praise, ver. 1-8. (2.) Sorrowful complaints of divine desertion; and of the prevalent power, cruelty, and derisive contempt of enemies, ver. 9-16. (3.) Solemn protestation of continued integrity, and of constant adherence to the Lord's way, amidst these manifold calamities, ver. 17-22. (4.) Strong cries, with supplications and tears to God, for his merciful appearance for and granting her relief, ver. 23-26.

In singing this, let me rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Let me rejoice in what the Lord hath wrought for his people, in any former period; and in all their afflictions let me be afflicted. Let me give the Lord no rest, till he make his church a joy in the whole earth.

Psalm 45

To the chief Musician upon Shoshannim, for the sons of Korah, Maschil, A Song of loves.

In this song of loves, are celebrated, (1.) The glories of Jesus our Redeemer, particularly the transcendent comeliness and blessedness of his person, God-man; his almighty power in conquering his people, and destroying his enemies; the eternity, firmness, and equity of his government: his royal union with the Holy Ghost above measure; his fitness for his work, and the splendor of his court, ver. 1-9. (2.) The glories of the redeemed; their listening to Jesus' proposals of marriage union with himself; their renunciation of all others for his sake; their reverential submission to, and worship of him, ver. 10-11; their glorious ornaments of righteousness and grace; and their glorious entrance into the new covenant, and the eternal state, ver. 12-15; their glorious succession and work, for perpetuating the fame of the Redeemer, ver. 16-17.

In singing this *song of the Lamb*, let me with open face behold his glory, and be changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord. Let my admiration of his excellency swell to the brim, and my love burn with a most vehement flame; and let my hopes of being forever with him, be

strong and lively. Let my heart be all wonder at his excellency, fullness, and grace all subjection to his government and laws; and let my lips be filled with his praise and honor all the day.

Psalm 46

To the chief Musician, for the sons of Korah, A Song upon Alomoth.

In this psalm, probably composed for celebrating some remarkable victory, we have, (1.) Bold triumphs of faith in God himself and the mercies of the new covenant, amidst the most alarming danger and distress which can be supposed: ver. 1-6. (2.) A thankful rehearsal of the great things which God had wrought for the deliverance of his people, and the destruction of their enemies, ver. 6-9. (3.) God's heart-composing promise of promoting his own glory in every providence; and faith's expectation of protection and safety, ver 10-11.

While I sing it, come my soul, encourage thyself in Jehovah as thy God, and thy all. Come drink abundantly out of Jesus' heart-gladdening river of life his word, his blood, his Spirit, his fullness, his love! And holding fast the beginning of thy confidence unto the end, always give thanks.

Psalm 47

To the chief Musician, A Psalm for the sons of Korah.

This psalm was probably composed on the same occasion as the 24th. Here is, (1.) A revenue of praise demanded for God, from all people, Jews and Gentiles, ver. 1, 6. (2.) A memorial of the grounds of praise, viz. the majesty of God's nature, ver. 2; the great things he had done, or would do for his people, in subduing their foes, and providing portions for themselves; and in ascending to heaven, to receive gifts, and prepare places for men, ver. 3-5; as also the high sovereignty and universal extent of his government, ver. 2, 7-9.

While my lips utter this song, let all my inward powers labor in viewing, in loving, in admiring, in extolling my great, my glorious, my ascended, my all-governing, all-doing, and all-giving Lord, Jesus Christ.

Psalm 48

A Song and Psalm for the sons of Korah.

This psalm was no doubt composed to celebrate some remarkable victory or deliverance, in the days of David, or Jehoshaphat, 2 Chron. 20; or of Hezekiah, 2 Kings 19. We have here, (1.) Jerusalem, the capital city of Israel, and type of the gospel church and heavenly state, celebrated for her beauty and relation to God, as the residence of his temple and ordinances, ver. 1-2. (2.) Jehovah, the God of Israel, celebrated for his kind and powerful protection of Jerusalem, and for making her enemies flee off with much precipitation and terror, ver. 3-7. (3.) The people of God, particularly in Jerusalem, meditating upon, and celebrating the gracious and mighty things, which God had, or would do for them, and for his discoveries of himself to them; and promising themselves sure and lasting happiness in his relation to, and direction of them, ver. 8-14.

While I sing these verses, let me be deeply affected with the glory, with the privileges, and chiefly with the God of the Christian church, and of the new-covenant state, and of the new Jerusalem, which is above, which is the mother, and the desired city of us all.

Psalm 49

To the chief Musician,
A Psalm for the sons of Korah.

This psalm is a mirror calculated to exhibit the emptiness of all worldly enjoyments. Observe, (1.) David's earnest attempt to awaken all ranks of mankind to a serious consideration of this matter, as a point of great importance and universal concern, ver. 1-4. (2.) His irrefragable proofs of the vanity of earthly enjoyments viz., that they cannot save from death either a man's self or his friend; and that they cannot make men wise or happy in this world, and far less render them happy in the future state, ver. 6-14. (3.) His attempt to comfort himself and other saints, under the sense of their daily infirmities, and of the chastisements received on account of their sins; and against the slavish fears of death, and temptations arising from the prosperity of the wicked, ver. 5, 15-18.

While I sing, let me bewail my sinful minding of, and idolatrous attachment to earthly things. Let me be henceforth as a weaned child, setting my affections on things above, where Christ is at the right hand of God. Let no uncertain riches or honors, but the living God, be the object of all my trust and joy.

Psalm 50

A Psalm of Asaph.

This psalm may be considered as a rebuke to the carnal Jews who rested in, and boasted of their external ceremonies in worship, to the neglect of the weightier matters of the law mercy, judgment, and faith; or as a prediction of the coming of Christ, to abolish the ceremonial worship, eject the Jews from his church, and establish a more pure and spiritual form of worship under the gospel: or, in fine, as a representation of the last judgment; in which Christ shall come, to render to every man according to his deeds. Observe, (1.) The awful appearance of God our Redeemer, in the flesh, in power, or in the clouds; with the gathering of the people to him: ver. 1-6. (2.) An engaging admonition to improve God's new-covenant grant of himself to be our God, as an excitement to exchange legal ceremonies into prayer, thanksgiving and holy obedience; or, at least, to give a remarkable preference to the latter, ver. 7-15. (3.) A terrible charge of hypocrisy, slander, contempt of God's word, and of atheistical imaginations concerning God, laid against the wicked, with a fearful sentence of condemnation founded thereon, ver. 16-22. (4.) An alarming warning of danger to the forgetters of God, and an encouraging promise to such as study to glorify him by a holy conversation, ver. 22-23.

Sing this, my soul, with solemn awe, assisted before the great Searcher of hearts, and as by faith beholding Jesus in my nature, sitting on his great white throne, gathering the nations to his bar, opening the books, and judging mankind out of the things found written therein.

Psalm 51

To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone into Bathsheba.

This psalm was penned by David, when reproved by Nathan for his adultery with Bathsheba, and for his murder of Uriah, 2 Sam. 12. We have in it, (1.) David's candid and truly sorrowful acknowledgments of his sin, particularly his adultery and murder, as highly dishonoring to God; and of his original sin, as the source thereof: ver. 1-5, 17. (2.) His earnest supplications for pardon of his offences, and for heart-purifying, and renewing grace; for renewed influences of the Holy Ghost; for peace of conscience, and comfortable fellowship with God, for himself, ver. 1-2, 6-15; and for reformation of, and prosperity to the church, which had been hurt by his sin, ver. 18-19. (3.) His sincere purposes of heart, to improve God's favor to himself, in promoting the instruction of others, and in giving them an honorable pattern of an exact celebration of God's public worship, ver. 13-16, 19.

While I sing this penitential psalm, let my heart be filled with clear but evangelic views of my aggravated, my unnumbered transgressions; and with deep sorrow and remorse for them. Let me pour forth supplications, strong cries and tears to him who is able to forgive all mine iniquities, and to deliver me from every corruption. Let me wash myself in Jesus' blood, as the fountain opened to men for sin and for uncleanness.

Psalm 52

To the chief Musician, Maschil, A Psalm of David, when Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul, and said unto him, David is come to the house of Ahimelech.

This psalm relates to Doeg the Edomite, who informed Saul how Ahimelech the high priest had entertained David and his servants; and who, in consequence thereof, had murdered Ahimelech, and above fourscore other priests, 1 Sam. 22. Here, (1.) David charges Doeg that, notwithstanding the manifested and everlasting goodness of God, he gloried in his malice, craft, cruelty, and other wickedness, ver. 1-5. (2.) By the spirit of prophecy he condemns him for his wickedness, to be plucked from his dwelling, and rooted out of the land of the living, to the great joy of the fearers of God, ver. 6-7. (3.) He comforts himself in the everlasting mercy of God, and with the assured hopes that he should yet praise him for his kindness, ver. 8-9.

Learn, O my soul, to detest all deceit and cruelty. Learn to imitate the goodness of God, which endure continually; and while friends are cut off, or foes prevail, let me live by faith on a gracious God, as my all and in all.

Psalm 53

To the chief Musician upon Mahalath, Maschil, A Psalm of David.

This psalm is much the same as the 14th. It speaks, (1.) Humbling convictions to all men of their sinfulness of nature and practice: ver. 1-3. (2.) Fearful terrors to them who persecute and oppress the people of God, ver. 4-5. (3.) Abundant comfort, in the salvation of God to his persecuted saints, ver. 5-6.

Learn, my soul, frequently to review thy original and thy contracted filthiness. Admire the patience and mercy of God towards mankind. Trust not in man, for wherein is he to be accounted of! But in the full assurance of faith, wait patiently for God's salvation.

Psalm 54

To the chief Musician on Neginoth, Maschil, A Psalm of David, when the Ziphims came and said to Saul, Doth not David hide himself with us?

This psalm was composed when the Ziphites, men of the same tribe with David, instigated Saul to destroy him, and directed him how to accomplish it, 1 Sam. 23-24. It contains (1.) David's strong cries to his God, that he would save and judge him, and hear his requests, ver. 1-2. (2.) Bitter complaints of the oppression and impiety of his enemies, ver. 3. (3.) His triumphant consolation in the view of what God was to him, and would do for him, intermixed with holy resolutions to praise God for his kindness, ver. 4-7.

While Satan and my lusts, and the men of the world, unite to destroy me, let me call on God. Let me be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Let me rejoice in him, who hath delivered, who doth deliver, and in whom I trust that he will deliver me.

Psalm 55

To the chief Musician on Neginoth, Maschil, A Psalm of David.

This psalm was probably penned by David when he fled from Jerusalem for fear of Absalom his son, 2 Sam. 15-16. Observe, (1.) David's earnest prayers for help and favor from God amidst his great oppression, grief and fears: ver. 1-8. (2.) His request for the just manifestation of God's vengeance, in the dispersion and destruction of his enemies, who, in Jerusalem, particularly Ahithophel, had behaved in so base and treacherous a manner, ver. 9-15. (3.) Resolved on frequent and fervent prayer, he encourages himself and friends to trust in God for support and deliverance, and for the speedy destruction of their enemies, however deceitful and bloody, ver. 16-23.

While I sing, behold, my soul, as in a glass, how Jesus our Redeemer, was hated, was betrayed, and murdered by his brethren of Judah, at Jerusalem; and how the fearful vengeance of the Almighty overtook them, on that account. And if I am oppressed, defamed, or persecuted, that I know not whither to flee; if in cities, or by particular friends, wickedness and malice discover themselves, let me study resignation to the disposals of Providence, and call upon God in the assured hopes that he will answer in due time. Let me cast all my wants and burdens on him, who is my God, that doth me save.

Psalm 56

To the chief Musician upon Jonath-elem-rechokim, Michtam of David, when the Philistines took him in Gath.

This psalm was penned by David, when the Philistines apprehended him in Gath, 1 Sam. 21:10-15. It contains, (1.) His earnest supplications to God for merciful protection, and deliverance from his enemies, who were barbarous, powerful, crafty, malicious, and restless: ver. 1-2, 5-7. (2.) His assured confidence

in God, as his own God, who had spoken good concerning him, and took particular notice of his grievances, ver. 3-4, 8, 11. (3.) Firm hopes that his prayers should issue in the defeat of his enemies, and that his faith would set him above the slavish fears of men, ver. 9-11; and that, while he paid his vows to God, he should have further occasion to praise the

Lord, for what he had done, and would do for him, ver. 12-13. Thus let me, in all my straits, have recourse to God. While his promises remain infallible, let me rejoice therein, and, without anxiety, cheerfully expect their fulfillment.

Psalm 57

To the chief Musician, Al-taschith, Michtam of David, when he fled from Saul in the cave.

This psalm was penned by David, when he fled from Saul in the cave; 1 Sam. 24; and contains, (1.) David's earnest betaking of himself to God upon whom all his dependence, was fixed, towards whom all his desires were bent, and from whom only he expected relief for mercy amidst his great troubles, ver. 1-2. (2.) His complaints of the cruelty, malice, and calumnious deceit of his inveterate enemies, ver. 3-4, 6. (3.) His believing triumph in God; in which he prepares himself for praising God, excites himself to it, delights himself in it, and furnisheth himself with matter for it, ver. 7-10. (4.) Conscious of his own inability to praise God enough, he leaves it on God, to exalt and glorify himself, ver. 5-11.

While I sing, let me cry aloud for mercy; let me lay my spiritual and temporal adversities before the Lord; and let me triumph in the God of my salvation; and employ him to glorify his name in all the earth.

Psalm 58

To the chief Musician, Al-taschith, Michtam of David.

This psalm was probably composed by David, when Saul carried on some kind of legal prosecution against him, which is not mentioned in the history of his reign. Here, (1.) He describes the corruption of these judges' government, in neglecting to do justice, and in readiness to do injustice; and the corruption of their nature, with their malice, falsehood, and obstinate untractableness, ver. 1-5. (2.) He prays that God would disable them to perpetrate mischief; would defeat their projects, and weaken their influence, ver. 6-8. (3.) He predicts their ruin, as calculated to promote the comfort of the godly, and the conviction of sinners, ver. 9-11.

While I sing, let me search out my corruptions, and bewail my obstinate refusals of Jesus Christ, and the counsels of his word. Let me dread the speedy, but awful vengeance of God, if I regard iniquity in my heart, or indulge it in my life.

Psalm 59

To the chief Musician, Al-taschith, Michtam of David; when Saul sent, and they watched the house to kill him.

This psalm was penned by David, when Saul sent messengers to watch his house in order to kill him, 1 Sam. 19. In it, as in the seven immediately preceding, we have, (1.) David's bitter complaints of his enemies, as wicked, barbarous, malicious, and atheistical: ver. 1-7. (2.) His predictive prayers that God would expose these enemies to contempt and derision; make them standing monuments of his just indignation; deal with them according to their sins; consume them in his wrath; and even render their sin their punishment, ver. 8, 10, 15. (3.) His holy resolutions to wait upon God, till his judgments should be executed upon them; and then to praise him for his protecting power, ver. 9-10, 16-17.

While I sing, let me think of the opposition made to David's Lord, and of the unrelenting vengeance which hath overtaken his enemies, Jewish and Heathen, and shall overtake his Antichristian and other opposers. While his honors are trampled under foot, let me wait on, and trust in God; that at last I may join in the hallelujahs of his people, when the smoke of his enemies' torment ascend up forever and ever.

Psalm 60

To the chief Musician upon Shushan-eduth, Michtam of David, to teach; when he strove with Aram-naharaim, and with Aram-zobah, when Joab returned and smote of Edom, in the valley of Salt, twelve thousand.

This psalm was penned by David, during his wars with the Syrians and Edomites, 2 Sam. 8. Here, (1.) He bewails the tokens of God's displeasure with Israel, in the breaking and disjoining of the nation, under Saul and Ishbosheth, ver. 1-3. (2.) In thankful contemplation of the late revival he had given to their affairs by his own accession to the throne, and victories over the Philistines, Moabites, etc., he beseeches God to grant them victory over, and rest from all their other enemies, ver. 4-5. (3.) In the confident expectation of God's fulfillment of his promises, along with the importunate supplication, he express his triumphant hopes, that God would quickly subdue every enemy, the fortified cities of Edom not excepted, ver. 6-12.

In all my distressed cases, let me rejoice in the banner, the ensign given and displayed to the nations; and in the faith of God's promise let me firmly expect victory over every spiritual foe, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God, the full enjoyment of the Canaan that is above.

Psalm 61

To the chief Musician upon Neginoth,
A Psalm of David.

Here, (1.) David, in commemorating what the Lord had formerly done to him, and in the faith of what he had promised, cries to God for comfort and protection, amidst great troubles, ver. 1-4. (2.) In the view of what God had and would forever do for him, he supplicates necessary mercies, and resolves on everlasting praise and thanksgiving to God, as his bounden duty, ver. 5-8.

So may all providences, distressful or smiling, lead my soul to a thankful panting for God, as my all and in all.

Psalm 62

To the chief Musician,
A Psalm and Song of David.

Here we are directed to praise God, (1.) For his kindness manifested in his kingdom of grace in hearing prayers; in pardoning iniquities; in satisfying the souls of his people with his blessings; and in protecting and supporting them in every exigency, ver. 1-5. (2.) For his kindness in the kingdom of Providence in fixing the mountains; in calming the seas; in preserving the regular succession of day and night; and in rendering the fields fruitful, and the flocks numerous and happy, ver. 6-13.

While I sing, let praise wait, in my soul, for the Lord; and let me pour out my heart before him. Under a deep sense of guilt and pollution, let me believe his unbounded forgiveness, and sanctifying influence. Let me come even to his seat, and enjoy ravishing fellowship with him. Let all my confidence be fixed on him; and, even in the blessings of Providence, let me discern the exceeding riches of his grace.

Psalm 66

To the chief Musician,
A Song or Psalm.

In this psalm of thanksgiving, in which the fate of Israel is to be considered as typical of that of the gospel church and people of God, we have, (1.) David, as the messenger of God, calling all the nations of mankind to praise God for the manifestation of his sovereign dominion in his works, so wonderful in themselves, terrible to his enemies, comfortable to his people, and commanding and awful to all men, ver. 1-7; and for trying his people with afflictions, for supporting under them, protecting amidst them, and delivering from them at last, ver. 8-12. (2.) David, as the servant of God, exemplifying his own exhortations in honoring God, by costly oblations, and by thankful declarations of what God had done for his soul, particularly in answer to his prayers, ver. 13-20.

Psalm 67

To the chief Musician on Neginoth,
A Psalm or Song.

Here we have, (1.) David's prayer for the church of Israel: ver. 1. (2.) His supplication for the comforting, and praise-producing spread of the gospel among the Gentiles, ver. 2-5. (3.) His believing prospect of the divine blessings, and true piety, which should attend the same, ver. 6-7.

While I sing, let me request the salvation of Israel. Let me supplicate the gathering of the nations to Shiloh. Let me praise the Lord, that already this great work is begun; and that the Lord, who is mighty, shall finish it in his time.

Psalm 68

To the chief Musician,
A Psalm or Song of David.

Perhaps this psalm was composed on the same occasion as the 24th and 47th, when David brought up the ark of God to that tabernacle, which he had pitched for it in Zion, 2 Sam. 6. We have in it, (1.) Fervent supplications that God would scatter and defeat the projects of his enemies: ver. 1-2. (2.) High praises to God for his infinite greatness and grace; his righteous relieving of the afflicted and oppressed; his directing of Israel in the Arabian desert; his manifesting of his glory at Sinai; his comfortable providing for his people in the wilderness, and in Canaan, ver. 3-10; and for his easy conquest of their Canaanitic enemies; his fixing his temple on mount Zion; for the ascension of Christ to glory, to receive gifts for men; and for the spread of the gospel among Jews and Gentiles, by means of the apostles; while the obstinate Jews are severely punished, ver. 11-32; and, in fine, for his superior dominion; his awful majesty; his mighty power; for the glory of his sanctuary, and the grace he bestows upon his people, ver. 33-35.

While I sing, let me behold, let me admire, what God is, and hath done for, and to my soul, and to the church of God, of which I am a member. Let me behold what God hath done, in instances unnumbered, in prosecution of the covenant he made with his eternal Son.

Psalm 69

To the chief Musician upon Shoshannim, *A Psalm of David.*

This psalm is much like the 22nd, representing at once the troubles of David and of David's Lord, and the glories which followed. We have in it, (1.) Bitter complaints of long and sore troubles; of the malice and multitude of enemies; of the unkindness of friends; of general contempt: and these mingled with candid acknowledgments of guilt, and with supplications for God's gracious audience and merciful deliverance, ver. 1-13. (2.) Pleas insisted on, in these supplications, viz. the mercy and truth of God; the psalmist's own great distress; the insolence and cruelty of his enemies; and the unkindness of his friends, ver. 14-21. (3.) Predictions of the ruin of David's, and especially of Christ's Jewish enemies; importing that their sacrifices and their common food should be cursed to them; that they should be plagued with judicial blindness and wrathful disquiet; that they should be rendered public monuments of the vengeance of God, having their church and state quite unhinged, and their land desolated; and, in fine, that their ruin should be increasing, and their recovery almost impossible, ver. 22-28. (4.) Under a deep sense of his poverty and distress, David, and his divine Son, celebrate the high praises of God, and call others to praise him for the deliverances of Israel; but chiefly for the erection of the gospel church, and for the certain, though still future recalling of the Jews into the same, ver. 29-36.

While I sing, let me behold my Redeemer, charged in law with my sins, and bearing the punishment thereof. Let me learn with patience to run the race of holy obedience and of necessary trials set before me, looking to Jesus as my pattern, and as the author and finisher of my faith. While I behold the tremendous severity of God's judgments against his ancient people, for rejecting and murdering his Son, let me not be high-minded, but fear. Let me behold the grace of our Lord Jesus, who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor; that we through his poverty might be made rich. And let me be a living and lively member of that church which is founded in his blood, and blessed in him with all spiritual blessings.

Psalm 70

To the chief Musician, *A Psalm of David*, to bring to remembrance.

This psalm is much the same as the five last verses of the 40th. In it David prays, (1.) For divine help to himself: ver. 1, 5. (2.) For shame and confusion to his enemies, ver. 2-3. (3.) For joy and comfort to his friends, ver. 4.

While I sing, let me apply it to my own troubled circumstances, and so in a believing manner, bring them and the sinful causes thereof, to my remembrance.

Psalm 71

This psalm was probably penned on the occasion of Absalom's rebellion, as Psalm 3rd, 42nd, 43rd; or of Sheba's conspiracy, 2 Sam. 20. It contains (1.) David's firm confidence in God encouraged by manifold experiences of his gracious kindness: ver. 1, 3, 5-7. (2.) His fervent prayers that he might never be ashamed, but might be delivered; might find rest in God; might have constant matter of new praises and thanksgivings afforded him; might not be forsaken of God in his old age; and might have his numerous, powerful, and crafty enemies, confounded with shame and perplexity, ver. 1-13, 18. (3.) His confident and joyful expectations of God's further kindness, particularly that God would never forsake, but revive him; that he would increase his honor and comfort, and put his enemies to shame: Along with which he resolves, with admiring rapture, to extol God's righteousness and salvation, and his new-covenant relation to himself, and to Israel, ver. 14-24.

While I sing, let me be affected with my troubles. Let me never stagger at the promise through unbelief, but be strong in the faith, giving glory to God.

Psalm 72

A Psalm for Solomon.

This psalm was composed by David, about the time of Solomon's installment in the throne of Israel, 1 Kings 1 and 2. With respect to him, here is, (1.) Fervent prayer for proper qualifications to furnish him for government: ver. 1. (2.) Predictions of the peace, glory, extent, wealth, duration and happiness of his government, ver. 2-17. (3.) Praise to the God of Israel for his mercies to his people, ver. 18-19. But as our Redeemer is principally intended, we have concerning him, (1.) His being furnished with the Holy Ghost above measure, to qualify him for his work: ver. 1. (2.) The glories of his government; how righteous, how prudent, how orderly, how condescending and merciful, how destructive to oppressors, how efficaciously productive to real religion, and how comfortable to his faithful subjects his administrations are! ver. 2-9. How extensive his church, among all ranks and nations; how tender his care of the meanest of his subjects; how much he is revered and adored by them; how astonishing their increase, by means of his gospel truth preached; and how permanent and useful his government! ver. 10-17. (3.) A solemn ascription of all the praise of these wonderful works to God alone, with an earnest request and believing expectation, that his glory shall fill the whole earth, ver. 18-19.

While I sing these lofty notes of the dying psalmist, let me admire, let me adore, let me sing praises to Jesus my King. Let me rejoice in his highness and in his extensive usefulness to men.

Chapter 73

This psalm addresses the question of why the righteous suffer while the wicked prosper, and prays for an end to our long exile. Read and you will find repose for your soul.

This psalm, and the ten following, are called *Psalms of Asaph*; but whether because he composed most of them, or because he led the music in singing them, is not altogether certain. Here we have, (1.) The great foundation of all religion, viz. the goodness of God to his people, strongly asserted, ver. 1. (2.) The psalmist's faith fearfully shaken by the consideration of the freedom, prosperity, plenty, and peaceful-like death of the wicked; which rendered them proud, oppressive, insolent, atheistical, and profane; while himself was in a manner consigned to nothing but trouble, ver. 2-13. (3.) The temptation, when it had reduced him to the brink of atheism, is broken, by a discovery of the connected purposes and providences of God in his word and ordinances, ver. 14-20. (4.) His improvement of his fall and recovery, to promote a deep sense of his own meanness, ignorance, and folly; a complete dependence on God as his guide; a cleaving to him as his portion, infinitely preferable to everything else; without whom one is necessarily miserable, and in the enjoyment of whom he is assured of happiness, and excited to praise and thanksgiving, ver. 21-28.

While I sing, let me remember my own wickedness and folly; and let me receive instruction in duty. Let me cleave to God as my portion, and resolve to draw my light and comfort from the oracles of his mouth, and ordinances of his grace.

Chapter 74

The psalmist mourns and weeps over all the synagogues and study halls that have been burned: the Philistines destroyed the Tabernacle of Shiloh; Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the first Temple. We have been in exile for so long, without seeing any signs of redemption! When will the redemption come? Read, and you will find lamentation and consolation.

This psalm relates to the destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, or to some similar disaster. In it we have, (1.) The church's bitter complaints of God's displeasure; of the outrage of her enemies; and of the apparent hopelessness of her case, ver. 1-11. (2.) Strong and heart-encouraging pleadings with God, upon the account of his relation to his people, and of the great things he had done for them, and that he was at once their God and the God of nature; that therefore he would remember to execute just vengeance upon his sworn enemies, and grant help and relief to his covenant people, ver. 12-23.

While I sing this, let me admire the sovereignty and holiness of God, in so severely correcting his own people. And let the broken, the deserted condition of the church, in this land, deeply affect my heart, and excite my earnest prayers for her restoration.

Chapter 75

How great is Israel! During their holidays they do not engage in frivolity, but in song and praise, and the study of the holiday's laws. Also, when they proclaimed (at the giving of the Torah), "We will do and we will hear!" they allowed the world to remain in existence. This psalm also admonishes those who indulge in worldly pleasures and attribute their prosperity to their own efforts.

Here, (1.) David returns thanks to God for advancing him to the throne of Israel, and resolves to act for the public welfare, ver. 1-3, 9-10. (2.) He rebukes the insolence of such as opposed his advancement, which sprung from the sovereign disposal of God, the judge of the world, and denounce their destruction, ver. 4-8.

While I sing, let me think of Jesus, whom God hath crowned with glory and honor, and of the infinite danger of opposing his government. And if he exalt me to the spiritual honors of his kingdom, let it be my care to glorify him, and to profit his people.

Chapter 76

This psalm contains the prophecy of when the vast army of Sennacherib was seized with a deep slumber that rendered the hands of the soldiers powerless to raise their weapons; thus did they all fall in battle.

This psalm is like to the 48th, and was penned on occasion of some remarkable victory; but whether in the days of David, Asa, Jehoshaphat, or Hezekiah (2 Chron. 14, 20, 32), is uncertain. We have in it, (1.) Encouraging congratulations of the church's happiness, in having God so manifested in her, and so near unto her; and in having his power so employed in her behalf, to the advancement of his own glory, and the destruction of her enemies, ver. 1-6. (2.) Important instructions how to improve this victory, to the terror of enemies, the comfort of saints, and the excitement of all to vow to God, and to obey and revere him, ver. 7-12.

While I sing this psalm, let my soul bless the Lord, that my lot hath been always cast in a land of gospel light. Let me, with thankful heart, remember what he hath done for this church and land; and give him the praise of every deliverance. Let me never fear the rage of men; but in every danger and doubt commit my way to God, that he may bring it to pass.

Chapter 77

This psalm relates to, (1.) A most afflicted case, in which are remarkable, fervent, and incessant prayers, agonizing restlessness, heart-overwhelming meditations, melancholy fears, and almost desperate outcries, concerning God, ver. 1-9. (2.) The effectual cure of this mournful case, by serious meditation on, and solemn acknowledgment of the power, greatness, and grace of God, as our God; and of the holiness and mysteriousness of his providential conduct; particularly in bringing Israel out of Egypt, and leading them through the wilderness, to the promised land, ver. 10-20.

While I sing, let me stand in awe of that God, who so chastise his favorite saints. Let me sympathize with men of wounded spirits. If my soul is overwhelmed within me, let me call to mind the gracious

Four character, and great works of my God, for his church, or for my soul.

Chapter 78

This psalm recounts all the miracles that God wrought for Israel, from the exodus of Egypt to David's becoming king over Israel.

This psalm is but a brief instructive history of the transactions between Israel and their God, for about four hundred and eighty years, from Moses to David. Here is, (1.) The introduction, containing a solemn call to an attentive consideration of God's words and works, in order to a faithful transmitting of the knowledge thereof to posterity, that they might set their hope in God, and reform from their fathers' wickedness, ver. 1-8. (2.) The history itself, in which are exhibited, 1. God's favors to Israel before their settlement in Canaan, in plaguing the Egyptians; in dividing the Red Sea; in giving them water from the rock, and manna from heaven; in bringing them into Canaan, notwithstanding their unnumbered provocations, particularly their forgetfulness of his mighty works, their ingratitude for his favors, their murmuring against his trying dispensations, their eagerness to satiate their lusts with his benefits, their impenitent obduracy, or hypocritical repentance under his rebukes, ver. 9-55. 2. Their ingratitude, treachery, and idolatry, after their entrance into Canaan; with God's righteous resentment thereof, in removing his tabernacle from Shiloh, and in delivering up his ark and people into the hand of the Philistines, ver. 56-64. 3. God's merciful return to them, in obliging the Philistines, by the plague of emrods, to restore his ark; in at length providing an habitation for it at Jerusalem; and in raising up and qualifying David, a descendant of Judah, to govern them in a manner both honorable and happy, ver. 65-72. These things are more largely recorded in the books of Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1st and 2nd Samuel, and part of 1st Kings.

While I sing, let me, with grief and shame, remember my own and my fathers' transgressions against the Lord. Let me adore the infinite patience, power, and mercy, holiness and equity of God. Let me bless his holy name, for the multitude of his undeserved favors towards me, and towards the church. And though he cause grief, let me hope that, in due time, he will have compassion.

Chapter 79

In this psalm, Asaph thanks God for sparing the people and directing His wrath upon the wood and stones (of the Temple). Still he cries bitterly, mourning the immense destruction: The place where the High Priest alone was allowed to enter-and only on Yom Kippur-is now so desolate that foxes stroll through it!

This psalm relates to the havoc made of the Jewish capital and nation, by the Chaldeans and Syro-Grecians, as typical of the afflictions of the gospel church. Observe (1.) How deplorable the condition of these people of God was, when their enemies raged against their dwellings, persons, and characters; and their God himself long continued the tokens of his just displeasure, ver. 1-5. (2.) Their humble, but fervent supplications, for the just punishment of their heathen enemies; and for divine pity, pardon, and help to themselves, ver. 6-12. (3.) The pleas wherewith they enforce their requests, viz. God's relation to them, as their God and shepherd; and the tendency of what they asked to promote the declarative glory

of his name, ver. 1, 6, 9-10, 13.

While I sing, let my soul have a deep sympathy with the afflicted members of Christ. Let me bless his holy name that I am not in similar circumstances. Let me lay before the Lord the spiritual injuries which Satan and my lusts have done to my soul, and to the church of God; and let me cry earnestly for his merciful rising up to destroy them, and to show me his salvation.

Chapter 80

An awe-inspiring prayer imploring God to draw near to us as in days of old.

This psalm was probably composed for the *Feast of Trumpets*, on the first day of the seventh month, Lev. 23:24. Here are, (1.) Solemn exhortations to praise God for what he is to his people, and for what he hath done for them, ver. 1-7. (2.) Instructions concerning God's new-covenant grant of himself and his benefits to men; their ungrateful refusal thereof; and the misery they incur, and happiness they lose thereby, ver. 8-16.

While I sing, let my soul consider what God is to, hath done for, and given to men to me: and let all my inward powers steadfastly believe his declarations, and eagerly embrace his offers. Let my heart be filled with grief, that ever I refused to hear my own gracious God speaking from heaven, and offering to me all the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Chapter 81

This psalm was chanted in the Holy Temple on Rosh Hashanah, a day on which many miracles were wrought for Israel.

This psalm was probably penned for the direction and warning of the Jewish courts of judicature. It represents (1.) The dignity of magistrates, and their dependence on God as their sovereign Governor and Judge, ver. 1, 6. (2.) Their duty, ver. 3-4. (3.) Their too frequent degeneracy and mischievousness, and the just punishment thereof, ver. 2, 5, 7. (4.) The saint's request for the establishment of God's kingdom in the world, ver. 8.

While I sing, let me stand in awe of Jehovah's authority and presence. Let me remember I must be answerable to him for all my conduct. Let me be affected with my meanness and corruption. Let me revere magistrates as the deputies of God on earth. And in every station in which God hath placed me, let my care be, in all things to live honestly, and to cry mightily that the kingdoms of this world may quickly be made the kingdoms of my Lord and of his Christ.

Chapter 82

This psalm admonishes those judges who feign ignorance of the law, dealing unjustly with the pauper or the orphan, while coddling the rich and pocketing their bribes.

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Chapter 83

A prayer regarding the wars against Israel in the days of Jehoshaphat, when the nations plotted against Israel.

This psalm relates to some combinations of the Heathens around, against the Hebrews, either in the days of David, 2 Sam. 8 or 10, or of Jehoshaphat, 2 Chron. 20. It contains, (1.) A solemn remonstrance to God concerning their malicious designs against his church and honour, ver. 1-8. (2.) Fervent supplications to God that he would defeat these attempts; protect and preserve his church; humble his enemies, and glorify himself in the world, ver. 9-18.

While I sing, let me be affected with the inward combinations of my own lusts with Satan and the world, and with the joint endeavors of open enemies and naughty professors against the church and interests of Christ; and commit the cause to God who judge righteously.

Chapter 84

In this psalm of prayers and entreaties, the psalmist mourns bitterly over the destruction of Temple from the depths of his heart, and speaks of the many blessings that will be realized upon its restoration. Fortunate is the one who trusts it will be rebuilt, and does not despair in the face of this long exile.

This psalm is much like the 27th, 42nd, 43rd, and 63rd, and may have been composed on the same occasion with the former, when David was banished from Jerusalem by Absalom his son, 2 Sam. 15-16. We have here, (1.) David's ardent affection towards the public ordinances of God, and sense of their happiness who enjoyed them, ver. 1-7, 10. (2.) His heart-burning desire to the God of ordinances, ver. 8-9. (3.) His assured faith of God's kindness, and persuasion of the happiness of such as trust in him, ver. 11-12.

So let my heart cry out for God, the living God. So let me covet earnestly intimate fellowship with him in his ordinances. So let me praise his name, and hold on in his way, till I arrive at the Zion above. So let God be my friend, my protector, my supplier, my store, and the everlasting rock of my rest.

Chapter 85

In this prayer, lamenting the long and bitter exile, the psalmist asks why this exile is longer than the

Chapter 86

The psalmist weeps and laments bitterly over the maladies and suffering Israel endures in exile, which he describes in detail.

In this doleful psalm, after a very short declaration of his faith, we have, (1.) Heman's bitter wailing over his distressed case, that his troubles were great; his body at the point of death; his soul filled with grief; his God hiding and angry; his mind distressed with terrors; and his friends unkind, ver. 3-9, 14-18. (2.) His bitter groans to, and expostulations with God, importing, that he had long cried for mercy, and that in death nothing could be done for him, etc., ver. 1-2, 9-14.

While I sing, let me think how dreadful hell must be, when even fatherly chastisements are so severe; how dreadful the enormity of sin, which provokes God so grievously to afflict his dearest favourites; and how necessary it is to retain our faith of our relation to God, amidst the worst of troubles.

Chapter 89

This psalm speaks of the kingship of the House of David, the psalmist lamenting its fall from power for many years, and God's abandonment and spurning of us.

This psalm was perhaps composed on the occasion of Absalom's rebellion, 2 Sam. 15; or of the revolt of the ten tribes, from their subjection to the family of David, 1 Kings 12; or it relates to the Chaldean oppression and captivity, 2 Kings 24-25. In the first, and joyful part, we have, (1.) The foundation of all comfort, happiness, honor, and stability, laid in the mercy of God, and his covenant with David, emblematic of that made with Jesus Christ for the redemption of mankind, ver. 1-4. (2.) A celebration of the God of the covenant, in his faithfulness, glory, greatness, mercy, and equity; and in his works, ver. 5-14; and of the glorious dignity, happiness, and safety of the covenant people, ver. 15-18. (3.) A bundle of covenant promises, securing proper qualifications, assistance and glory, to the Head of the covenant; and indefeasible blessings to his covenant seed, notwithstanding their manifold sins and chastisements, ver. 19-37.

In the second, and mournful part, we have (1.) Grievous lamentations over the dishonor, distress, and danger of David's family, ver. 38-45. (2.) Expostulations with God concerning the same drawn from the continuance of trouble; the shortness of human life, and certainty of death; the withdrawal of former kindness promised in the covenant; and the insolent reproaches of enemies, ver. 46-51. (3.) A triumphant conclusion of praise to God, ver. 52.

While I sing, let me chiefly keep mine eyes on David's Lord. Let me with joy behold the covenant made with him, for our redemption. Let me adore my covenant God, as in him, well pleased for his righteousness' sake, and rendering him and his seed most blessed for evermore. And as Jesus' sufferings for me purchased my eternal happiness, let never my own, or the church's troubles weaken my faith, or make me drop my songs of praise.

Psalms: Book 4

Books Four and Five are very different in form and content and develop this drama in new ways. In Book Four, especially, Moses is more prominent, and the Exodus traditions are as important as those of David and Zion. Here the psalms echo a constant theme of coping with loss: this seems to reflect on the experience of exile, with the land, Temple and King, the identity markers of the people, all having been removed. Book Five has many of the features of Book Four: but it reflects on better times, celebrating God's return to Zion through the restored Temple.

Book Four is our focus today. It has seventeen psalms, mirroring the seventeen psalms in Book Three. In turn it has four collections of psalms. But first let me persuade you that the experience of the exile has influenced the compilation of this fourth book.

There is no doubt that the emphasis here on Moses and the Exodus traditions corresponds with other biblical texts which were written during the time of the exile. The best example is Isaiah 40–55, a prophetic book which also addresses the trauma of the people in Babylon. Interestingly, there are many common themes between Book Four of the Psalter and this exilic prophet. For example, Book Four begins and ends with pleas to God to 'take pity' on his people (90:13 and 106:45, using *ḥn*); the beginning and ending of Isaiah 40–55 are on exactly the same theme (Isa. 40:1 and 54:11, also using *ḥn*)⁴. At the beginning of each book, in Ps. 90:5 and Isa. 40:6–8, human frailty is compared with grass (*ryx*). And in Pss. 96:1 and 98:1, as well as in Isa. 42:10, we read of the 'new song' which is to be sung to celebrate what God will later do for his people. Furthermore, the universal reign of God is defiantly declared throughout both works, for example in Ps. 96:4–5 and Isa. 40:18–23. Each denounces the worship of all idols, each playing on the Hebrew words for 'gods' (*ḥyhlā*) and 'nobodies' (*ḥylylā*): see Ps. 96:5 and Isa. 40:17–18.5 There is however one key difference: Book Four is more explicitly interested in Moses – indeed, Moses is only mentioned once in the Psalter outside Book Four, but seven times within it⁶ – whilst Isaiah 40–55 prefers not to refer explicitly to Moses but to the Exodus traditions in general as a basis for hope. Nevertheless, the experience of exile is a significant influence in each case.

So we shall focus on Book Four as part of the story of the rise and fall of the covenant with David. My own approach is like that of Erich Zenger, who also wrote on Book Four from a Christian perspective, seeing 'Israel und Kirche im gemeinsamen Gottesbund'.⁷ Zenger made it clear that the two faiths are to be interpreted 'side by side', rather than using the psalms to argue for the superiority of one faith over the other. So the two Jewish covenants of 'Moses and Torah' and 'David and Zion' and the later Christian covenant with its two parts, one of 'Jesus the Teacher', following the tradition of Moses, and the other of 'Christ the Messiah', following from the tradition of David, are inextricably bound together. We need to engage with each other in humility. After all, each faith tradition derives its identity not from its own merit but from the mercy (*dsj*) of a God who invites 'all who fear him' (Ps. 103:11, 17) to participate in his Kingdom.

So Book Four is part of a larger drama: it tells its own story in four scenes. It starts with Moses the mediator (Psalms 90–92); it moves on to focus on the Kingship of God (Psalms 93–100); it pauses to

reflect briefly on the experiences of a king like David (Psalms 101–103); and it ends again with Torah as Creation and Exodus come back in view (Psalms 104–106). There is much here which allows both Jewish and Christian readings, not only in theology, but also in experience. If these psalms were to remind a beleaguered people, living in exile in a foreign land, that God was still on their side, there is much for us all to learn from them. This is not just about events in the sixth century BCE, but concerns circumstances which have been experienced continuously by Jewish and Christian communities through the ages; so all who feel like strangers and sojourners in a foreign land can participate in this story as well.

Scene One: A 'Moses Collection' Psalms 90–92: Seeking God's Refuge in Exile

Psalms 90–92 share the common theme of the ephemeral nature of humanity and Moses plays a central part in 'communicating' this. 'Moses, man of God' is not only in the heading to Psalm 90: parts of Moses' speeches in Deuteronomy 32 and 33 and Exodus 32 are interspersed throughout these three psalms as Moses represents the authoritative mediating voice from the past. The three psalms move in an increasingly hopeful sequence from lament (Psalm 90) to divine promise (Psalm 91) to thanksgiving (Psalm 92). The key theme in these three psalms is that, rather than depending on any human institution, God is now the refuge of his people (Pss. 90:1; 91:1–2, 9–10; 92:12–13): he is to be found by 'night and day' (90:5–6; 91:5–6; 92:2).

Psalm 90 reminds us immediately of Psalm 89, concerning the brevity of life (90:3–6; 89:47–48): we sense the people still living the judgement of God (90:7–10; 89:46) as the question 'how long?' is repeated in Pss. 90:13 and 89:46). Verses 1–6 lament human mortality; vv. 7–12 reflect on God's wrath. Verses 13–17 petition God to restore his 'dwelling place' with his people.

Christian writers through the ages have commented on the theme of 'refuge in God' in this psalm, including Basil the Great and Athanasius. Perhaps the best-known Christian reading of this psalm in English, also focusing on the theme of God as Refuge, is the eighteenth century hymn by Isaac Watts: O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home. A thousand ages, in thy sight, are like an evening gone; short as the watch that ends the night, before the rising sun. Time, like an ever rolling stream, bears all who breathe away; they fly forgotten, as a dream dies at the opening day.

Psalm 91 is set in the form of a divine oracle and as well as emphasizing again that God is our refuge (91:2, 9) it stresses some deliverance from evil. The first promise of God as refuge (vv. 1–8) offers an extraordinary image of God as a mother eagle who protects his people from the 'snare and fowler' and the night-time and noon-day demons. The second promise of refuge (vv. 9–13) refers instead to God sending protective angels. The third promise (vv. 14–16) consist of eight blessings, using eight verbs of protection: here, unusually in the Psalms, God speaks in the first person.

The evidence from Qumran suggests that Psalm 91 was used as an apotropaic text on amulets, magical papyri and house walls (vv. 5–6 or 10–13 was used). This suggests the background to the citation of vv. 11–12 by Satan in Jesus Christ's temptations: Satan states 'It is written, "He will give his angels charge

of you" and "On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone" (Matt. 4:6). Similarly v. 13, which refers to being unhurt by the lion and adder, is used in Lk. 10:19: in Christian tradition this later became known as an 'exorcism text' where Satan is described as a Hunter, and sin is personified as a wild beast, and Christ has power over both.²¹ This association of Christ's protection over the night-time demons resulted in Psalm 91 being used in Benedictine tradition as the first psalm for Compline Psalms, as the monks sought protection through the night hours.

Psalm 92, 'A Song for the Sabbath' is linked to 91 by its reference to God as 'Most High' (92:1; see 91:1, 9) and to witnessing the downfall of the enemy (92:11; see 91:8). The reference to God being exalted 'on high for ever' in v. 8, at the heart of the psalm, points ahead to the first Kingship Psalm, 93:4. The whole mood of the psalm is of optimistic trust by one who feels secure in the promises of God. Verses 1-5 are a thanksgiving song; vv. 6-11 are a testimony to God's righteous judgment; and vv. 12-15 testify to God's blessings (using the same metaphor of the 'tree' in the Temple forecourts as is found in Pss. 1:3 and 52:8).

Although there is no reference to the Sabbath in the text, the sevenfold use of the name HaShem may have contributed to the title: this is 'A Song for the Sabbath'. Otherwise the divine order in creation is affirmed, for to remember the Sabbath is to remember that we are all made in God's image – thus opening the psalm up for Christian as well as Jewish use.

Scene Two: The Kingship Psalms Psalms 93–100: 'The Lord Reigns!'

Psalms 93–100 explicitly and implicitly testify to a greater king than David: God alone is King. Moses and Torah still appear in these psalms²² but it is the sovereignty of God over the entire cosmos which dominates this collection. Although Psalms 94 and 100 make less explicit references to God's Kingship, the whole collection may be seen as follows:

- Psalm 93: God's kingship is forever
- Psalm 94: God will come to judge the nations of the earth
- Psalm 95: God's people are called upon to acknowledge God as king
- Psalm 96: 'Sing to the Lord a new song'
- Psalm 97: God reigns in Zion
- Psalm 98: 'Sing to the Lord a new song'
- Psalm 99: God reigns in Zion
- Psalm 100: The whole earth is called upon to acknowledge God as king

Psalm 93 begins with 'The Lord reigns!' (ûlm hwhy, noting this is a verbal form): vv. 1-2 claim HaShem has always been king from time immemorial, and now through the praises of his people he becomes their king. Verses 3 and 4 take up the myth of God's cosmic battle with the sea, and v. 5 affirms that Jerusalem ('thy house') is where God's eternal rule and earthly abode intersect.²⁴ In Christian tradition Psalm 93 is used at the Feast of Ascension: God's victory over the cosmic and chaotic waters is another means of describing Christ's victory over death, so that the phrase 'Christ is risen!' has the same connotations as 'The Lord is king!' – i.e., an event in the past made present in

previous ones, and implores God to quickly fulfill His promise to redeem us. Every individual should offer this psalm when in distress.

This psalm relates to some remarkable deliverance of the Jewish nation; but whether that effected by the advancement of David to the throne, or that from the Assyrian invasion, 2 Kings 19, or from the Chaldean captivity, Ezra 1, is uncertain. It contains (1.) Thankful acknowledgments of divine favours received, ver. 1-3. (2.) Supplications that further favours and deliverances may be speedily bestowed, ver. 4-7. (3.) Firm expectations of a gracious answer, in the coming, mediation, and blessings, of the Messiah, ver. 8-13.

While I sing, let my soul be affected with the mercies, which I, which my country, which the church of God, have enjoyed. Let me be thereby encouraged to plead for more. And let me, without doubting, credit the promises, and expect supply from the fullness of Christ.

Chapter 86

This psalm contains many prayers regarding David's troubles, and his enemies Doeg and Achitophel. It also includes many descriptions of God's praise. Every individual can offer this psalm when in distress.

This psalm contains (1.) David's fervent supplications, that God would hear his prayers, ver. 1, 6-7; mercifully preserve and save him, ver. 2-3, 16; and afford him joy, strength, and honor, ver. 4, 11, 17. (2.) His pleas, wherewith he enforce his prayers, drawn from the goodness of God, ver. 5, 13, 15; his own relations to, and trust in God, ver. 2, 4, 16; his former experience of God's kindness, ver 17; and from the malice of his enemies, ver. 14. (3.) His ascription of praise to God, as matchless in his nature and work; as the sole object of worship; and as great and infinitely gracious, ver. 8-10, 12-13.

While I sing, let me remember, that the psalmist hath left me an example that I should walk in his steps.

Chapter 87

Composed to be sung in the Holy Temple, this psalm praises the glory of Jerusalem, a city that produces many great scholars, eminent personalities, and persons of good deeds. It also speaks of the good that will occur in the Messianic era.

This psalm is an encomium upon mount Zion, as typical of the gospel church. (1.) For the sake of the temple, mount Zion is preferred to every other place in Canaan; as more honoured by God and more delighted in by him, ver. 1-3. (2.) In respect of better inhabitants, greater stability, and more important joys and blessings, the church is preferred to all other nations, ver. 4-7.

While I sing, let me observe the dignity of relation to Jehovah as my God. Let me praise him for founding his church on Jesus the unmoveable Rock of ages that the gates of hell cannot prevail against her. Let me rejoice in the glorious promises made concerning her, and supplicate the speedy, the remarkable fulfillment thereof. And while I with joy draw water out of her ordinances, her wells of salvation, let me live as an holy, a cheerful member of her society.

worship and praise. The Gospel reading for Ascension Day, usually from Lk. 24:44-53, thus becomes the lens through which this psalm is read.

Psalm 94 has a very different tone with its emphasis on 'God of vengeance' (twmqnAla). Nevertheless, the psalm picks up the theme in Psalm 92 of God as 'my Rock' (yrwx) in Ps. 92:15 (Heb v.16); here in 94:22 it is (ysjm rwx). And the reference in Ps. 94:8 to dullards and fools (μyrb and μylysk) s an echo of 92:6 (Heb v.7) (rfb and lysk). Psalm 94 begins as a lament, pleading with God to inaugurate on earth the rule celebrated in Psalm 93 (vv. 1-2, 3-7); it then turns into a didactic psalm, reminding the congregation of the depth and extent of evil (vv. 8-11, 12-15). It ends in the confidence that God will come to our aid, and by way of two rhetorical questions (vv. 16 and 20) affirms that justice will prevail. This is a difficult psalm because of its theme of 'God of vengeance'. In Christian tradition the reference to the condemnation of the innocent to death (v. 21) has been interpreted as referring to the passion of Christ.25 Augustine argued that the psalm is really about the conflict between Divine Grace and Free Will (seen especially in vv. 8-11) where God has to come to our aid.

Psalm 95 calls on God's people to acknowledge God as king. It is linked to Ps. 94:22 in its image of God as 'Rock' in v. 1. The myth of God's battle with the cosmic sea is again alluded to, but the psalm consists mainly of invitations to praise (vv. 1-6) and an exhortation to obedience by learning from the lessons of history (vv. 7-11). In Christian tradition the very first call 'O come let us sing to the Lord', and the dual theme of worship and obedient faith with the final promise of 'rest' (v. 11), resulted in this being the key psalm which was recited at the beginning of morning prayer in the Liturgy of Hours. Known even today as the Venite ('O Come ...') it is still a key psalm at Morning and Evening Prayer. Furthermore, the call to praise in v. 5, 'O come let us worship' inspired the Christmas carol 'Venite Adoremus' ('O Come all ye Faithful') with its theme of giving worship to Christ, the newborn King.

Psalm 96 begins 'O Sing to the Lord a new song'. It also takes up again the combat myth which becomes the 'new song' of deliverance (vv. 1-6), regarding other deities as nothing – a theme most appropriate for the exiles tempted to worship what they could see and touch – Babylonian idols. From this idea, other nations, with their deities 'dethroned', are thus called upon to praise the true Lord (vv. 7-10); heaven and earth are called upon to join in this praise to the God who has come and will come again (vv. 11-13).

This psalm is used in 1 Chron. 16:23-33, after Ps. 105:1-15; in a later period was re-read as the fulfillment of the promises made to the exiles. Christians have re-read this again in the light of another fulfillment: God's Kingdom is always entering history, and the 'new song' now is the Kingdom of God inaugurated through Jesus Christ (Mk. 1:14-15). Psalm 96 is often used along with Psalm 97 and 98 in the liturgy for Christmas Day, sometimes with the Old Testament reading from Isa. 9:6-7 (on a royal figure who will bring in the righteous rule of God) along with Lk. 2:1-14 (on the birth of Jesus).

Verse 10 is perhaps the most controversial verse in this psalm. A mistranslation of the Greek into Latin reads 'The Lord reigns from the tree'; Christian illuminated manuscripts in the Middle Ages have interpreted this psalm with images of Christ on the cross.

Psalm 97 returns to a theme which ended Psalm 93: God's rule in Zion. Here the combat myth takes up imagery of God as Lord of the storm gaining victory over other deities (vv. 1-7) which culminates in Zion and Judah rejoicing at his exaltation (vv. 8-12).

Christians have interpreted the idea of God gaining victory over the gods and dwelling among his people to refer to the incarnation, where Christ personifies Zion; so this psalm, along with Psalms 96 and 98, became an important part of the liturgy for Christmas Day. It is also used at Epiphany, which celebrates the coming of the wise men to worship Jesus Christ as the King.

Psalm 98 is paired with 96 in its call to 'sing a new song' (vv. 1-3) and, using imagery from a combat myth, calls on all the earth is called upon to worship the Lord as King (vv. 4-6); even the sea and floods, symbols of chaos, join in this celebration (vv. 7-9).

The Christian Fathers read both Psalms 96 and 98 as 'the church's song to Jesus Christ': the universal application of the psalm made such an appropriation possible, for this is a song for Gentiles as well as Jews.31. With Psalms 86 and 97 it is part of Christmas liturgy, and here the Gospel reading is usually from Jn. 1:1-14. Verses 4-9 were the inspiration for Isaac Watts' Christmas hymn, 'Joy to the World'. Heinrich Schütz's 'Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied' was based on Psalm 98, as was James MacMillan's 'A New Song', recorded only in 2006. Psalm 99 is paired with 97, and again uses the myth of the victory of the storm god to celebrate God's universal world rule which is particularized in his dwelling in Zion (vv. 1-5). Moses the intercessor (as in Psalm 90) is recalled along with Aaron and Samuel (vv. 6-8) to illustrate again that God's Kingship pre-dates that of David. The psalm ends with a call to worship God in Zion (v. 9).

Again the 'indwelling' theme is taken up by Christians who see this is fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. Giovanni Gabrieli's Motet for Six Voices, 'Timor and Tremor', is based upon this psalm.

Psalm 100 is more of a thanksgiving than hymn, and is paired with 96 in its call to all nations to worship God in Zion with Israel, using a common exilic theme of the people as God's flock and God as their Shepherd (vv. 1-3). The psalm ends with a call to process together to the Temple (vv. 4-5).

This perspective of God's 'steadfast love' being poured out over all the earth has made this a popular psalm for Christians. It was the inspiration for the sixteenth century 'All People that on Earth do Dwell', attributed to Louis Bourgeois of John Calvin's church in Geneva, translated from the French by William Kethe. A very different version from the same period is Christopher Tye's 'Omnes Gentes'. A century later Thomas Ken composed a doxology from this psalm which became known as the 'Old Hundreth':

Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host; Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

It is intriguing to note that nowhere in the collection do we find any reference to David, although there are several references to God's choice of Zion, to which, after a victory over other nations and their deities, he will return. It is not hard to see why this collection would have been so important for the post-

exilic community upon their return to Zion, for they were indeed without a Davidic king: here was their reminder that God always has been and always would be their King.

Scene Three: A 'Davidic Collection' Psalms 101-103: Considering David

David returns briefly at this point, for Psalms 101 and 103 each have Davidic headings; the overall theme is one of suffering and God's compassion within it; and Psalm 102, without a Davidic heading in the Hebrew, also fits this theme.

Psalm 101 speaks of an unnamed ruler who seeks to be a model servant of his people. The fact that Zion is referred to (v. 2, also found in the following psalm [102:21] and in the last psalm of the previous collection [100:4]), suggest this is an idealized Davidic king who first prays for divine favor (vv. 1-2) and then makes seven promises of fidelity (v. 3-8). The emphasis on obedience (admittedly without any specific reference to the Torah) reminds one of the Deuteronomic (and hence Mosaic) view of kingship as in Deut. 17:14-20, where the king is servant to the law.

A similar royal 'manifesto' of obedient service is also found in, for example, Lk. 4:16-21, where Jesus applies a similar passage concerning an obedient servant from Isa. 61:1-2.

Psalm 102 is an individual lament, whose first part is a plea for God to hear (vv. 1-11), followed by a statement of confidence in the eternal God who once ruled from Zion as king and who will build up this city once again (vv. 12-22). The final part is a prayer for the psalmist's life to be spared (vv. 23-28). There are some correspondences with Psalms 90-92, for example the sense of permanence of HaShem contrasted with the fragility of human life in Ps. 102:13 was also expressed in Pss. 90:2 and 92:7.

One of the issues of interpretation in this psalm is whether the 'affliction' is, literally, about an individual or a dramatic personification of Zion itself, with some affinities with the book of Lamentations; if so, this links more with the theme of Psalms 93-100.

Cyril of Jerusalem writes about how this world will perish (vv. 18-28) but urges that humans can receive the gift of immortality through Christ. However, the psalm has usually been read by Christians not so much doctrinally as personally: it has been marked out, from Augustine onwards, as one of the seven penitential psalms of the church. In the Christian liturgical year it is often read on New Year's Day, in part because of its theme of the brevity of human life and the dependence of all humanity upon God.

Psalm 103, with its Davidic heading, continues the theme of divine permanence over human transience, but focuses on God's justice and compassion rather than judgment and anger. Verses 1-5 speak of God's forgiveness, reminding us of the image of the eagle in Ps. 91:1-6; vv. 6-14 are about God as healer of the nation, citing an early creed in Exod. 34:6-7 about God's mercy being greater than his anger. Verses 15-18 focus again on human transience while vv. 19-22 emphasize divine permanence, reflecting again on the creed in Exodus 34. For those in exile this psalm, stamped with the authority of David in its heading and the authority of Moses in its Exodus creed, this would have been 'good news' indeed.