

Psalms

Original Historical Setting

Author: Several. Notables: Moses, David, Solomon, Asaph

Written: Written 1500's BC (Moses), others around 1000 BC (David) and still others after Babylonian invasion around 586 BC.

Audience: God's people who could relate to the emotions of the authors regarding life and God.

Occasion: Songs for many occasions: worship services, weddings, pilgrimages to Jerusalem, crowning of a king, and soldiers on the march...as well as many personal experiences.

Timeline:

- ~1500 BC – Moses writes Psalm 90
- ~1000 BC – David writes many Psalms
- ~550 BC – Psalm 137 written in Babylon

World Events that occur simultaneously

- ~1500 B.C. – Hindu scriptures (Vedas) begin
- ~1100 B.C. – China develops the mouth organ
- ~1000 B.C. – Lyre players painted on Philistine jars
- ~387 B.C. – Plato starts the Academy of Athens

Genre/Literary style

An anthology of Hebrew poetry

Features and Structure

- The book is divided into 5 sections—possibly echoing the five books of Moses:
 - Book 1 (Ch 1-41)
 - Book 2 (Ch 42-72)
 - Book 3 (Ch 73-89)
 - Book 4 (Ch 90-106)
 - Book 5 (Ch 107-150)

Key text(s)

23:1-6 – The LORD is my shepherd

100:1 – Make a joyful noise

119:105 -- Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet

What to look for

- Enjoy the Psalms for what they are: beautiful poetry. Many times the authors employ repetition, parallelism and contrast to make their point clear.
- Notice that since the Psalms were meant to be sung, there are quite a few musical terms given (*shiggaion*, *maskil*, *miktam*, and *selah*), the meanings of which are only speculation as the true meanings are lost.
- Notice that the last psalm in each of the first four books (sections) has a concluding doxology (praise repeated by the congregation during worship services) and Psalm 150 forms a doxology for all five of the books of the Psalms.

Interesting facts

- Since there are 31,102 verses (an even number) in the King James Bible, there is no middle verse as a popular email would like us to believe. The middle comes between Psalm 117:1 and 117:2, not Psalm 118:8. These are actually the only verses in Psalm 117 making it the shortest chapter in the Bible too.
- The Myles Coverdale translation of 1535 was also called the “Bug Bible” because Psalm 91:5 read, “Thou shall not need to be afrayed for eny bugges by night.” In Middle English “bug” meant “an object of terror.”
- The longest chapter in the Bible is Psalm 119 with 176 chapters. The poem has 22 eight-verse sections. Each section begins with one of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet starting with *Aleph*, then *Beth* and so on.
- Psalms is the most quoted book in the New Testament 116 of the 283 OT quotations in the NT are from Psalms

Memory Verse: Psalm 19:7-11