

Out of Chaos: Let Our Ordered Lives Confess the Beauty of Peace

An Introduction to the Wisdom Books

Session 2: Psalms

This book has long been known as the Bible's prayer book. You are probably more familiar with Psalms than some of the other wisdom books, so we will start here.

It is central to the prayers of both Jewish and Christians, not only used for private prayer but liturgically. There are many types of Psalms including hymns of praise, thanksgiving, laments, processions, weddings, penitentials, and there are some wisdom psalms.

There is fairly wide agreement on the list of wisdom Psalms: 1, 8, 19, 36, 37, 49, 73, 78, 112, 119, 127, 128, & 139.

The Wisdom Psalms and prayers bring out the concept that we can talk to God as plainly and as directly as we need to do. It is OK to tell God you're angry, and even that you're angry with God himself because God would rather have your attention than for you to ignore him.

Psalm 19:13-15: Who can detect heedless failings? Cleanse me from my unknown faults. But from willful sins keep your servant; let them never control me. Then shall I be blameless, innocent of grave sin. Let the words of my mouth meet with your favor, keep the thoughts of my heart before you, Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Psalm 139 and the prayer of trust: This Psalm speaks of God's watchful care for us all the time, and the Psalmist also speaks quite frankly about how he would just as soon avoid God's gaze. He acknowledges not understanding the whole picture, begging for guidance where he does not sufficiently understand. It is in the spirit of trust where we cannot see how, or even if, things will work out.

Lord, you have probed me, you know me;
 You know when I sit and stand;
 You understand my thoughts from afar.
My travels and my rest you mark;
 with all my ways you are familiar.

Even before a word is on my tongue,
 Lord, you know it all.
Behind and before you encircle me
 and rest your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is beyond me,
 far too lofty for me to reach.

Where can I hide from your spirit?
From your presence, where can I flee?
If I ascend to the heavens, you are there;
if I lie down in Sheol, you are there too.
If I fly with the wings of dawn,
and alight beyond the sea,
Even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand hold me fast.
If I say "Surely darkness shall hide me
and night shall be my light"
Darkness is not dark for you,
and night shines as the day.
Darkness and light are but one.

You formed my inmost being;
you knit me in my mother's womb.
I praise you, so wonderfully you made me;
wonderful are your works!
My very self you knew;
my bones were not hidden from you,
When I was made in secret,
fashioned as in the depths of earth.
Your eyes foresaw my actions;
in your book all are written down;
my days were shaped, before one came to be.

.....
Probe me, God, know my heart;
try me, know my concerns.
See if my way is crooked,
then lead me in the ancient paths.

This Week's Meditation and Prayers

Cleanse me from my unknown faults (Psalm 19:13)

O Beloved, turn your awareness to my discomfort, and lift me from the darkness of conflict and confusion. Amen.

Darkness is not dark for you, and night shines as the day. Darkness and light are but one (Psalm 139:12)

O Beloved, let me praise you and give you thanks for being ever-with me on my journey. Comfort me and let me grow in awareness of your presence when darkness obscures my vision, for I am never in darkness when I am in your light. I pray with

*confidence that your light will shine in and through me this day. I am the light of the world.
I will let the light shine.*

**Lord, my heart is not proud; nor are my eyes haughty.
I do not busy myself with great matters, with things too sublime for me.
Rather, I have stilled my soul, hushed it like a weaned child.
Like a weaned child on its mother's lap, so is my soul within me.
Israel, hope in the Lord, now and forever. (Psalm 131:1-3)**

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O Beloved, I thank you that I don't have to know everything. I don't have to do everything. I rest in you and your knowledge of me, even before I was born and even to this minute. I am your child, in your lap, resting in trust and hope. Amen.

Appendix 2: Background on the Psalms

Selected information has been lifted from Wikipedia with footnotes and links removed for ease of reading.

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The **Book of Psalms** (/sɑ:mz/ or /sɔ:(l)mz/ *SAW(L)MZ*; Hebrew: תְּהִלִּים, *Tehillim*, "praises"), commonly referred to simply as **Psalms**, **the Psalter** or "the Psalms", is the first book of the *Ketuvim* ("Writings"), the third section of the Hebrew Bible, and thus a book of the Christian Old Testament.^[1] The title is derived from the Greek translation, ψαλμοί, *psalmoi*, meaning "instrumental music" and, by extension, "the words accompanying the music". The book is an anthology of individual psalms, with 150 in the Jewish and Western Christian tradition and more in the Eastern Christian churches. Many are linked to the name of David. In fact, of the 150 Psalms, David is named as the author of only 75. David is specifically noted as the author of 73 psalms in the titles of the psalms but his authorship is not accepted by some highly critical modern scholars.

The composition of the psalms spans at least five centuries, from psalms 29 to others clearly from the post-Exilic period (not earlier than the fifth century B.C.) The majority originated in the southern kingdom of Judah and were associated with the Temple in Jerusalem, where they probably functioned as libretto during the Temple worship. Exactly how they did this is unclear, although there are indications in some of them: "Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar," suggests a connection with sacrifices, and "Let my prayer be counted as incense" suggests a connection with the offering of incense.

Many scholars believe the individual Psalms were redacted into a single collection in Second-Temple times. It had long been recognized that the collection bore the imprint of an underlying message or metanarrative, but that this message remained concealed, as Augustine of Hippo said, "The sequence of the Psalms seems to me to contain the secret of a mighty mystery, but its meaning has not been revealed to me." (*Enarr.* on Ps. 150.1) Others pointed out the presence of concatenation, that is, adjacent Psalms sharing similar words and themes. In time, this approach developed into recognizing overarching themes shared by whole groups of psalms.

The **Second Temple** (בֵּית־הַמִּקְדָּשׁ הַשֵּׁנִי, *Beit HaMikdash HaSheni*) is the term used for the Jewish holy temple, which stood on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, actually two temple complexes which succeeded each other and allowed almost uninterrupted temple service between c. 516 BCE and 70 CE. It gave name to the Second Temple period.

According to the Hebrew Bible, it replaced Solomon's Temple (the First Temple), which was destroyed by the Neo-Babylonian Empire in 586 BCE, when Jerusalem was conquered and part of the population of the Kingdom of Judah was taken into exile to Babylon.

According to the Bible, the Second Temple was originally a rather modest structure constructed by a number of Jewish exile groups returning to the Levant from Babylon under the Achaemenid-appointed governor Zerubbabel. However, during the reign of Herod the Great, the Second Temple was completely refurbished, and the original structure was totally overhauled into the large and magnificent edifices and facades that are more recognizable. Much as the Babylonians destroyed the First Temple, the Romans destroyed the Second Temple and Jerusalem in 70 CE as retaliation for an ongoing Jewish revolt. The second temple lasted for a total of 585 years (516 BCE to 70 CE).

Jewish eschatology includes a belief that the Second Temple will be replaced by a future Third Temple.

Traditional rabbinic literature states that the Second Temple stood for 420 years and based on the 2nd-century work *Seder Olam Rabbah*, placed construction in 350 BCE (3408 AM), 166 years later than secular estimates, and destruction in 70 CE (3829 AM).

The fifth order, or division, of the *Mishnah*, known as *Kodashim*, provides detailed descriptions and discussions of the religious laws connected with Temple service including the sacrifices, the Temple and its furnishings, as well as the priests who carried out the duties and ceremonies of its service. Tractates of the order deal with the sacrifices of animals, birds, and meal offerings, the laws of bringing a sacrifice, such as the sin offering and the guilt offering, and the laws of misappropriation of sacred property. In addition, the order contains a description of the Second Temple (tractate *Middot*), and a description and rules about the daily sacrifice service in the Temple (tractate *Tamid*).