

Contents

Preface	7
General Introduction	11
Introduction	11
The Book of Psalms	13
Types of Psalms	14
Biblical Types	14
Modern Classifications	16
Messianic Psalms	16
Christ in the Psalms	20
The Imprecatory Psalms	21
The Hallelu	27
Psalms for Special Occasions	28
The Headings of the Psalms	29
The Writing of the Psalms	31
The Dating of Psalms	32
Objections to Davidic Authorship	33
The Collection of the Psalms	36
The Arrangement of Psalms into Books	37
The Numbering of Psalms	39
The Place of Psalms in the Old Testament	41
Canonicity	42
The Text	42
Basic Principles of Old Testament Textual Criticism	43
Guidelines for Textual Criticism of the Masoretic Text (MT)	44
The Textual Sources	44
The Poetry of Psalms	50
Parallelism	52
Other Poetic Features	55
Meter	55
Strophes and Stanzas	58
Acrostics	58
Stylistic Features	59

Figures of Speech	60
Sound Effects	62
The Psalms as Literature	62
Grammar and Vocabulary	62
The Main Grammatical Peculiarities of Psalms . . .	63
Word Usage	67
The Music of the Psalms	68
The Musical Notation of the Psalms	70
Musical Directions in the Psalms	73
The Musical Instruments of the Psalms	75
The History of the Use and Interpretation of Psalms . .	84
Gunkel's Form Criticism	86
Mowinckel's Theories	89
Recent Trends in Psalms Criticism	90
Luther and the Psalms	92
Luther's Appreciation of the Psalter	92
Luther's Lectures on the Psalter	93
Luther's Use of the Psalms in Private and Public Worship	97
Bibliography for Psalms	101
Commentary	113
Comments on Psalms 1–41	113
Comments on Psalms 42–72	431
Illustrations	
Types of Messianic Prophecy	17
Tone Melodies	71
Cheironomy	73
Harp and Lyre	79
Ancient Musicians with Lyres	79
Trumpets	80
Flutes	81
Tof	82
Maps	
David's Journeys Psalm 52	517
Israel's Neighboring Enemies Psalm 60	571

Preface

Less detailed and technical than the major academic commentaries on Psalms, this commentary focuses on the translation and interpretation of the Hebrew text as the foundation for a pastor's teaching and preaching on Psalms. Its purpose is to be a companion to the study of the Hebrew text. Those who use it are encouraged to translate and study the Hebrew text on their own before turning to the commentary. This commentary may be used to study the book of Psalms from beginning to end or to study individual psalms in preparation for sermons or classes.

The study of Psalms is complicated by the poetic character and diversity of the psalms and by the length of the book. This commentary aims to help pastors overcome these obstacles by setting two goals for this study of Psalms. First, the goal of the introduction to this commentary, which is somewhat more lengthy and technical than introductions to other books of the Bible might need to be, is to introduce the reader to the special features and problems of Hebrew poetry. This will serve as the introduction to both volumes of this commentary. The second goal of this commentary is to help pastors understand that the book of Psalms as a whole is a connected, well-organized collection of hymns. The relationship of each psalm to its neighbors is regularly included in the discussion of each psalm. There is benefit to studying each psalm as part of a group rather than in isolation.

Although we will study some of the most important psalms in more detail, in general we will have to limit our goal to gaining an understanding of the key points in each psalm and a general overview of the book as a whole. Even so, the length of Psalms has made it necessary to divide this commentary into two volumes. Volume 1 includes the introduction and bibliography and commentary on Psalms 1–72. Psalms 73–150 are covered in Volume 2. An index of word studies and topical studies that covers both volumes appears at the end of Volume 2.

The Commentary Proper

The general introduction is followed by the studies of the Hebrew texts of the individual psalms; each study consists of a section-by-section translation, translation notes, and commentary/application.

Translation

The comments on each psalm are based on an original translation of the text, but they also interact with the NIV and, to a lesser extent, with other widely used translations. The original translation is rather literal in order to help clarify the structure and idioms of the Hebrew text. Words added to the English translation to clarify the line of thought of the Hebrew text are usually placed in brackets. To the degree that this is possible, an attempt has been made to render an individual Hebrew vocable with the same English vocable whenever it occurs. For example, in dealing with the group of synonyms for enemies, the Hebrew אֹיְבִיִּים, the most general term for those who have enmity against someone, is usually translated “enemies.” צָרֵרִים refers to those who hem in or besiege someone and is usually translated “foes.” שֹׂנְאִים and בְּשֹׂנְאֵי, derived from the common verb for “hate,” are usually translated “those who hate me.” קְטָמִים, from the common verb for “rise,” is translated “adversaries,” and so on. These translation conventions are summarized in the special studies of semantic groupings that are scattered throughout this commentary. *Adonai* is transliterated as “Lord,” the Tetragrammaton as LORD, and the short form *Yah* as LORD. This distinction applies primarily to the translation. In the commentary itself, the form “Lord” is used throughout unless there is specific reference to one of the Hebrew forms of the divine name.

Formatting

In the formatting of the translation, an attempt has been made to reflect the structure of the parallelism of the Hebrew text. Parallel lines have the same margin. Run-on lines or subordinate lines are indented from the preceding line. A significant part of the interpretation of each psalm is incorporated into the psalm’s section headings, which have been inserted into the translation.

Notes and Comments

The comments on each psalm are divided into two parts. The first part considers translation questions, grammatical forms, idioms, textual variants, and so on. Only unusual or especially significant forms will be discussed, since it is assumed that readers will use standard translation helps and computer Bibles for needed information on vocables and forms. Sometimes grammatical points are included that are not particularly critical to the interpretation of the verse in question but will enhance the reader’s overall

knowledge of Hebrew grammar or syntax. Reference will be made to the standard grammars, especially Gesenius/Kautzsch (GK), Waltke/O'Connor (WO), and Joüon-Muraoka (JM), with occasional reference to others. The Hebrew verse numbers will be used throughout the discussions unless there is specific reference to an English Bible translation or a reference is the sort that a reader would be expected to look up in an English Bible. References to English verse numbers will be marked with the letter *E* when this seems necessary for clarity.

Occasionally there will be more detailed studies of key words or topics that are intended to be cross-referenced from other psalms. These are set off by borders. An index of all of these studies will be found at the end of Volume 2.

Application

The second division of the comments on each psalm focuses on application. A major part of this is application and meaning within the original setting of the author, at various stages of church history, and finally today. The comments and applications parallel those in my two-volume popular commentary on Psalms in the People's Bible series. This is in an effort to make this commentary more useful for pastors who are teaching Bible courses based on the People's Bible. Various interpretations of the texts suggested by other commentators throughout the ages will also be discussed, but there will be no footnotes and relatively few citations of other works. The introduction and bibliography suggest further resources for more in-depth study.

Introduction

Sing praises to God, sing praises;
Sing praises to our King, sing praises.
For God is the King of all the earth;
Sing to him a psalm of praise. (Ps 47:6,7)

The Lord invites us to praise him. God's goodness motivates us to praise him. God's people love to praise him with songs. Since the beginning of creation, God's angels have been singing his praises in heaven (Job 38:6,7). Throughout history God's people have been singing his praises on earth. Moses and all the people of Israel sang a song of victory on the shores of the Red Sea after the Lord had delivered them from Pharaoh's army (Ex 15). Deborah and Barak sang a song of victory when God had delivered the Canaanites into their hands (Jdg 5). Hannah celebrated the gift of a son with a song (1 Sa 2). David wrote songs for almost every occasion of life: happy songs to celebrate his blessings from God (Ps 18) and sad songs to lament his sins (Ps 38). Jesus and his disciples sang hymns in their last hours together before his death (Mt 26:30). Paul and Silas sang hymns to God in the jail of Philippi (Ac 16:25). Throughout eternity God's people will sing "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways" (Rev 15:3).

Music is a precious gift to God's people. Luther said, "Music is an endowment and gift of God. It drives away the devil and makes people cheerful. I place music next to theology and give it the highest praise." Partly because of Luther's love for music, Lutherans have made music a very important part of their worship. The Lutheran church has become known as the singing church. Christians regularly join in hymns to express their love for their Savior. Hymns are our joyful response to the Lord's invitation to sing his praises. Many of us received a hymnal on our confirmation day, which we cherish as one of the most important books we own. Because the love of Christ rules in our hearts, we are eager to practice the admonition of Scripture: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" (Col 3:16).

This central role of music in the life of Christians is one reason why the book of Psalms holds a special place in the devotional life of Christians. Psalms is the hymnbook of the Bible, a hymnbook given by inspiration of God. More than any other book, Psalms teaches us how to sing with gratitude in our hearts to God.

Psalms is also the prayer book of the Bible. Luther said, "Every Christian ought to know the psalms as well as he knows his five fingers." In the book of Psalms, the Holy Spirit himself teaches us words and thoughts for our prayers. We can use the psalms without change as our own prayers. Even those psalms that were written for specific situations in David's life usually do not name specific individuals or specific events, so they can be used by people facing similar situations. The psalms also give us many beautiful models to imitate in creating our own prayers tailored to our own situations. The book of Psalms expresses the whole range of emotions that God's people experience in this life. Nowhere will you find words expressing greater joy than in the psalms of praise and thanksgiving. Nowhere will you find words expressing deeper sorrow than in the psalms of repentance. Nowhere will you find more fervent expressions of both the sorrows and the joys that life on earth brings to God's people. The book of Psalms is a book for every occasion and every season of life.

Many of our Lutheran hymns and much of our liturgy are based on the psalms. For example, the canticle "Create in Me a Clean Heart, O God," which we sing often in our Sunday service, is taken from Psalm 51. Many other responses in our liturgy come from the psalms: "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. And his mercy endures forever" (Ps 136:1); "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps 34:8); "Oh, come let us sing to the Lord" (Ps 95:1-7); "O Lord, open my lips. And my mouth shall declare your praise" (Ps 51:15); "Let my prayer rise before you as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice" (Ps 141:2).

The traditional New Year's hymn "O God, Our Help in Ages Past" (*Christian Worship* [CW] 441), which is based on Psalm 90, and many other familiar hymns are simply rhymed versions of some psalms. "My Soul, Now Bless Your Maker" (CW 257) is based on Psalm 103. "Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun" (CW 84) is based on Psalm 72. "The Lord's My Shepherd; I'll Not Want" (CW 360) is a paraphrase of Psalm 23. The great hymn writer Isaac Watts wrote a hymn on each psalm. In recent years the chanting of psalm portions has been reestablished as a regular part of Lutheran services. A fuller understanding of our way of worship will, therefore, be a secondary benefit of the study of Psalms.

Psalms, which has far more chapters than any other book of the Bible, is a rich source of biblical doctrine. It teaches us about such varied topics as sin, repentance, and forgiveness (Ps 51); God's attributes (Ps 139); and God's works of creation and providence (Ps 104). The most important doctrine in the psalms is Christ our Savior presented in the many messianic prophecies. The book of Psalms had more influence on the New Testament than any other book. It is quoted approximately 80 times in the New Testament. About 120 of the 150 psalms are alluded to in some way in the New Testament. It is obvious that a study of Psalms will also help us gain a better understanding of the New Testament.

Every Christian who meditates on the words and teachings of the psalms will be blessed with spiritual growth. Like all Scripture, the psalms were written for our learning (Ro 15:4). They are "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Ti 3:16). Let us pray that the Lord will bless our study of the book of Psalms so that it yields rich blessings to us and to our congregations.

The Book of Psalms

The book of Psalms is a collection of 150 hymns. The Hebrew title of this book is not "Psalms" but "Songs of Praise" (שִׁירֵי תְהִלָּה). This form is the masculine plural. The usual form of this word in the biblical text is the feminine form שִׁירֵי תְהִלָּה. The use of the masculine form may suggest that this title for the book is a late rabbinic addition, but use of both the masculine and feminine forms of a word is not particularly unusual in biblical Hebrew. The Aramaic title of the Psalter is also "Songs of Praise."

Although Psalm 145 is the only psalm which is called a שִׁירֵי תְהִלָּה in its heading, "Songs of Praise" is, nevertheless, a very fitting title for the book as a whole. The book is filled with praise and thanksgiving. The "plot" of the book of Psalms moves from a focus on trials in the beginning toward a focus on praise at the end. The last five psalms, which emphasize the chief themes found throughout the whole book, all begin and end with the exclamation "Praise the LORD" (שִׁירֵי תְהִלָּה לַיהוָה).

The English title “Psalms” was adopted from ψαλμοί, the title which this book received in the Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint, which became the standard Bible for most of the early Christian church. This name also occurs in Luke 24:44. The Greek word ψαλμός refers to the music of a stringed instrument or to a song sung to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument. Ψαλμός was adopted as the Greek translation of the Hebrew word מְזִמֹּר, which also means “a song” or “a song accompanied by a stringed instrument.” This Hebrew word מְזִמֹּר is used in the headings of 57 of the hymns in the book of Psalms. For examples, see Psalms 3–6 and 82–85. It is this word מְזִמֹּר which is translated “psalm” by the NIV. Older commentaries and lexicons suggest that this word מְזִמֹּר was derived from the Hebrew root זָמַר, which means “to trim,” and that a מְזִמֹּר or “psalm” is, therefore, a song with carefully “trimmed” or measured lines. However, it is more likely that there are two different roots זָמַר, one of which means “trim” and one of which means “sing” or “make music,” and that מְזִמֹּר simply means “a song sung to accompaniment of a stringed instrument.” (Such homonyms occur often in English too. For example, the words *prune* as the name of a fruit and *prune* as a kind of cutting have nothing to do with each other.) The root *zmr* also occurs in other Semitic languages as a term referring to either instrumental or vocal music.

Since the title “psalm” is assigned to so many of the hymns collected in this book, *Psalms* is certainly a suitable title for the book as a whole, even though it is not the Hebrew title of the book.

In referring to individual hymns in this collection, we will follow the traditional practice of calling all of the hymns in the book of Psalms psalms, even though, strictly speaking, almost two thirds of them are some other type of song.

Types of Psalms

Biblical Types

It has been noted above that only 57 of the 150 hymns in the book of Psalms are specifically classified as “psalms” (מְזִמֹּר) in the

technical sense. Many of the hymns in the book of Psalms are assigned to some other musical or literary category.

About 30 of these hymns are called songs (שִׁיר) (for examples, Ps 18 and 96). The precise technical meaning of this title is uncertain, but it often occurs with joyful songs. It is noteworthy that it also occurs as a title for ancient Sumerian hymns. This title “song” is joined with the title “a psalm” about a dozen times (for example, Ps 65, 66, 68).

Some of the hymns are called prayers (תְּפִלָּה) (Ps 17, 86, 90, 102, 142). A plea to God to protect the psalmist’s life is a prominent element in most of the psalms with this title. For example, Psalm 17:14 reads, “O LORD, by your hand save me from such men, from men of this world whose reward is in this life” and Psalm 86:2 reads, “Guard my life, for I am devoted to you. You are my God; save your servant who trusts in you.” In Psalm 72:20 the title “prayers” is also assigned to the larger collection of hymns that makes up Book II of the Psalms.

The meanings of several of the hymn titles used in Psalms are so uncertain that they are left untranslated by the NIV. Several of the psalms are called *miktams* (Ps 16, 56–60). Some commentators, including Luther, have connected מִכְתָּם with כֶּתֶם, a poetic word meaning “gold,” and have suggested that מִכְתָּם, therefore, means “a choice piece,” “a gem,” or “a jewel.” Another suggestion is that מִכְתָּם is related to the Akkadian word *katamu*, which means “to cover” or “to atone for,” but atonement is not a prominent topic in the biblical *miktams*. Another suggestion is that מִכְתָּם refers to a memorial prayer inscribed on a tablet or to a poem of memorable thoughts. This interpretation is based on the rendering of the Septuagint (στίλογραφία) and the Vulgate (*tituli inscriptio*). Since prayers in the ancient Near East were sometimes inscribed on memorial steles or placed in the temple as written documents, this is a plausible suggestion. Nevertheless, we must admit that the meaning of the term eludes us.

Thirteen psalms are called *maskils* (for example, Ps 42–45). On the basis of one meaning of the Hebrew root שָׁכַל, this title is usually understood as describing a psalm for teaching or meditation. Another suggestion is that מִשְׁכִּיל means “a skillful psalm.”

Psalms 120–134 are classified as the Songs of the Ascent (שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלֹת). We will discuss various interpretations of this title in the introduction to this group of psalms.

Some additional titles which are applied to only one psalm or to a compact group of psalms will be discussed as we come to those individual psalms. In general it can be said that we do not know the pre-

cise difference between these various kinds of hymns, largely because we no longer know what kind of music accompanied them.

Modern Classifications

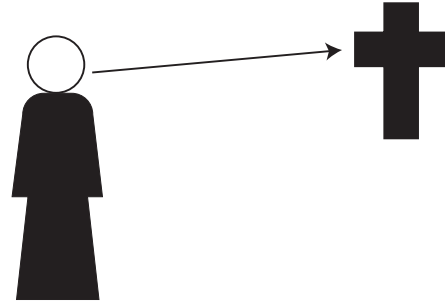
In addition to these classifications which are based on the original headings of the psalms, ancient and modern commentators have suggested several additional classification categories based on their own analyses of the style and subject matter of the psalms. The most ancient example of such classification is that of the seven penitential psalms, which have been treated as a group since at least A.D. 250 (Ps 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143).

Luther suggested that the psalms could be divided into five main types: (1) messianic psalms which speak of Christ (for example, Ps 2, 22, 110); (2) teaching psalms which emphasize doctrine (Ps 1, 139); (3) comfort psalms (Ps 4, 37, 91); (4) psalms of prayer and petition (Ps 3, 137, 143); and (5) thanksgiving psalms (Ps 103, 104, 136). Luther's five categories are useful for analyzing the main point of each psalm, but many of the psalms may be plausibly placed into more than one of these categories. Luther's categories are based on the theme or content of the psalm. The original Hebrew categories seem to be based more on style or a combination of style and content. Often there is not a consistent correspondence between the literary or poetic style of psalms and their contents. As a result, the specific classification of many of the psalms is debatable. The authors and first users of the psalms may have thought in categories quite different from ours. Nevertheless, the idea of classifying psalms is useful. In fact, there are two content-based classifications of psalms which deserve special discussion. These are the messianic psalms and the imprecatory psalms.

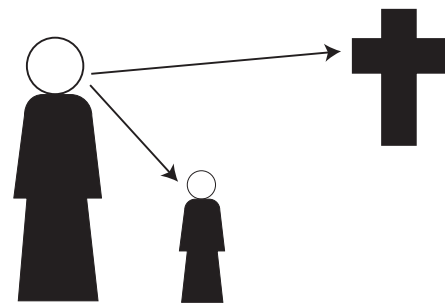
Messianic Psalms

Messianic psalms are those psalms which foretell important facts about the person, work, and kingdom of Christ. The Old Testament contains three types of prophecies concerning the coming Christ.

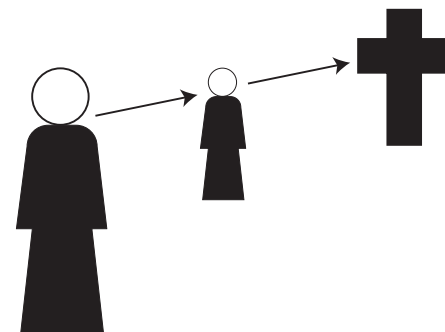
Direct prophecies are those prophecies in which the prophet is writing only about Christ. An example of a *direct prophecy* is Isaiah 7:14, "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son." This is a unique event which found fulfillment only in the life of Christ. Mary is the only virgin who gave birth to a son. An example of a direct prophecy in the psalms is Psalm 16:10, "You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay." As Acts 2:29-31 indicates, David was not talking about



1. Direct Prophecy



2. Typical Prophecy



3. Prophecy with an Intermediate Fulfillment