



The Psalms

An Introduction

Martin Luther

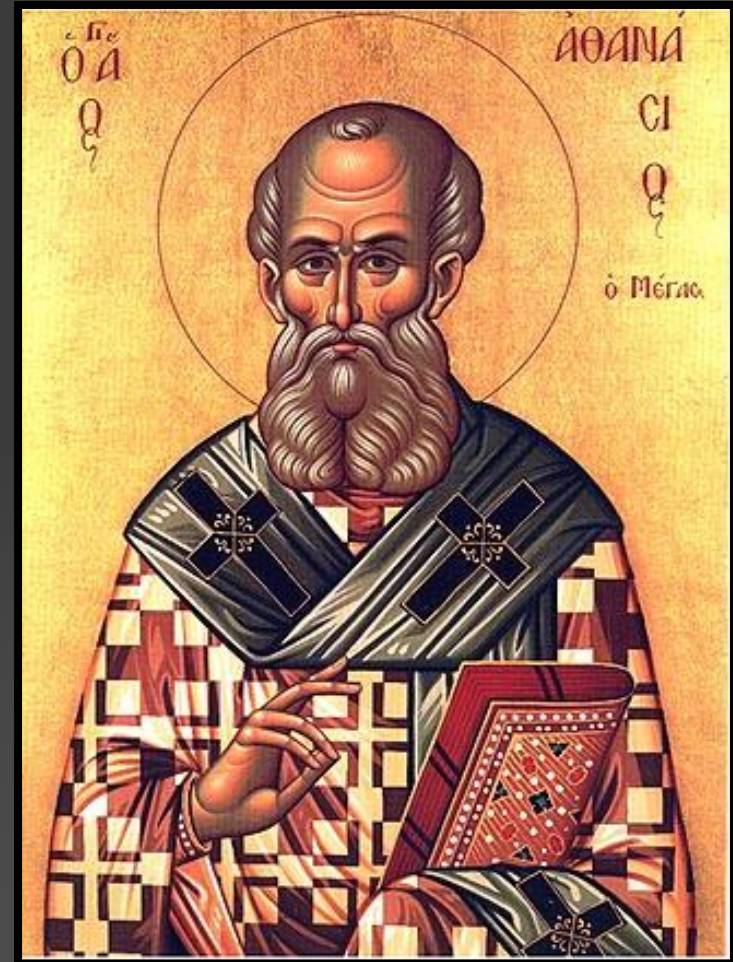
(10 Nov. 1483 – 18 Feb. 1546)



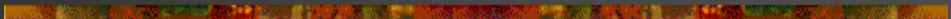
- The Psalter “might well be called a little Bible.
- In it is comprehended most beautifully and briefly everything that is in the entire Bible.
- It is a really fine... handbook.”

Athanasius on the Psalms

“It is my view that in the words of this book the whole human life, its basic spiritual conduct and as well its occasional movements and thought, is comprehended and contained. Nothing to be found in human life is omitted.”



(c. 293 – May 2, 373)



General Info on the Psalms

Source: Pamela J. Scalise, “The Psalms and Lamentations”

Psalm numbering: “books”

- **Five “books” in the book of Psalms, each ending with a doxology**

(cf. ANE [ancient Near East] scribal custom)

- **Book 1: Pss 1-41**
 - **Book 2: Pss 42-72**
 - **Book 3: Pss 73-89**
 - **Book 4: Pss 90-106**
 - **Book 5: Pss 107-150**
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- **Why 5? Perhaps 5 books of Moses, but not conclusive.**

Collections within the Psalms

- “Yahwistic” (Pss 1-41, 84-50) and “Elohistic” (Pss 42-83)
 - “Davidic” Pss 3-41, 51-71, 138-145
 - “of Korah” Pss 42-49
 - “of Asaph” Pss 73-83, 50
 - *Hallel* Pss 113-118 or 111-118, 135-136
 - Ascents Pss 120-134
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Psalm numbering: Verses

- In Hebrew Bible (Masoretic Text, MT), the authorship and notes are numbered verse 1.
 - Swedish Bibles follow this tradition.
 - In English Bibles, the notes are not numbered.
 - Some English commentaries use the Masoretic Text, so the numbering of verses may be “off” by one when compared to an English text but not the Swedish.
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Psalm numbering: Chapters

Masoretic Text (MT) in Hebrew	Septuagint (LXX) In Greek
1-8	1-8
9-10 acrostic	9
11-113	10-112
114-115	113
116	114-115
117-146	116-145
147	146-147
148-150	148-150
	151 (or “outside the number”) LXX Sinaiticus, OL, Sahidic Coptic

Dead Sea Scrolls

- 40 mss, from mid 2nd century BC (4QPsa) to ca. AD 50-68 (4QPsc, 11QPsApa), plus two from Masada and one from Nahal Hever
- Pss 1-89, with few variations, follow the order of MT, but many Pss scrolls differ radically in the order and contents of the rest of the book. E.g.
 - 11QPsa 1-89 + 101-151 with variations in order
 - 11QPsApa 1-89 followed by 4 pss against demons
 - 4QPsb 91-118, but without 92-111
 - 4QPsf 22, 107, 109 + 2 apocryphal psalms

Double tradition in OT

- Ps 18
 - Ps 15 (YHWH)
 - Ps 70
 - Ps 108
 - 1 Chron 16
- 2 Sam 22
 - Ps 53 (Elohim)
 - Ps 40:12-16
 - Pss 57:7-11, 60:5-12
 - parts of Pss 105, 95, 106
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Performative praise

- “The uttering of a performative is, or is part of, the doing of a certain kind of action” (Austin 1962, 5).
 - “I do (take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife)” — as uttered in the course of the marriage ceremony.
 - “I name this ship the ‘Queen Elizabeth’”
 - “I give and bequeath my watch to my brother” — as occurring in a will
- To pray these prayers and sing these songs is an act of submission, commitment and devotion to the LORD alone.



Psalm titles

Can we know the author?

Source: Peter C. Craigie, *Word Biblical Commentary, Psalms 1-50*, (Nelson, 2004) 31-35.

Psalm titles

- **116** of 150 psalms have titles, which are part of the canonical text
 - Of David (73) Ps 3-41, 51-71, 138-145
 - Of Korah (11) Ps 42-29
 - Of Asaph(12) Ps 73-83, 50
 - Of Solomon (2) Ps 72, 127
 - Of Moses (1) Ps 90
 - Ethan the Ezrahite (1) Ps 89
 - The music director or choir master (50+)
 - **Anonymous (34)**
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Hebrew preposition לְ

- Possible meanings:
 - “for” e.g. for David
 - “by” e.g. by David, as author
 - “to” e.g. dedicated to
 - “with reference to, concerning, about”
 - “for the use of”
 - “belonging to” e.g. a collection of David

Craigie says...

- The titles are frequently of more importance for understanding the role of a particular psalm in the context of the Psalter and in the **historical context of Israel's worship** than they are for understanding the original meaning and context of the individual psalm.
 - The possibility remains that it implies authorship, though there is **no persuasive evidence** to indicate that such is the case.
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Craigie says...

- But the **absence of precise information concerning authorship is not a serious setback** with respect to understanding the Psalms, for their theme is the relationship between a person and God, and their variations on that central theme have a universality and timelessness which transcends the particularities of authorship.
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Psalm Genre Circle

2. Lament

- Address to God
- Complaint, describing distress
- Petition for help (imperative)
- Motivation (to persuade God)
- **Expression of confidence or trust**
- Vow of thanks & praise

1. Orientation (Torah)

- Call to praise (imperative)
- Reason for praise

Other

- Royal, Zion, Enthronement
- Wisdom and “storytelling”

3a. Reorientation with Thanksgiving

DECLARATION of praise and thanksgiving

- Description of answered prayer
- Past Distress
- Petition for help (imperative)
- **Expression of trust**
- Promise of thanksgiving
- Deliverance recounted

RESPONSE

- Thanksgiving offerings
- Confession of God’s grace
- Prayer for future help

CALL to join in thanks and praise

- Imperative
- Reasons for praise

3b. Reorientation with Songs of Trust

- **Expressions of confidence or trust in God...**
- Reasons for trust

Psalm Genres classified by Dennis Bratcher

Lament	Community	12, 44, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 89*, 90, 94, 123, 126, 129
	Individual	3, 4, 5, 7, 9-10, 13, 14, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27*, 28, 31, 36*, 39, 40:12-17, 41, 42-43, 52*, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 64, 70, 71, 77, 86, 89*, 120, 139, 141, 142
	Penitential	6, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143
	Imprecatory	35, 69, 83, 88, 109, 137, 140
Thanksgiving (Toda)	Community	65*, 67*, 75, 107, 124, 136*
	Individual	18, 21, 30, 32*, 34, 40:1-11, 66:13-20, 92, 108*, 116, 118, 138
	Salvation Hist.	8*, 105-106, 135, 136
	Songs of Trust	11, 16, 23, 27*, 62, 63, 91, 121, 125, 131
	Hymn of praise	8*, 19:1-6, 33, 66:1-12, 67*, 95, 100, 103, 104, 111, 113, 114, 117, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150
Liturgical	Covenant	50, 78, 81, 89*, 132
	Enthronement	2, 18, 20, 21, 19, 45, 47, 72, 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 101, 110, 144
	Songs of Zion	46, 48, 76, 84, 87, 122
	Temple liturgy	15, 24, 68*, 82, 115, 134
Spec	Wisdom	1*, 36*, 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128, 133
	Torah	1*, 19:7-14, 119

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*These psalms are difficult to classify because they could fit into more than one group of are mixed types.