

## The Book of Psalms



Dear parishioners, I am delighted to continue our biblical journey. In this article, I will explore the Psalms with you. This subject will be covered in three articles. Here is the first article, titled “The Five Books of Psalms.”

The Book of Psalms is part of the Old Testament—specifically, the Wisdom Books—of which there are seven: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes (or Qoheleth), Song of Songs, Ecclesiasticus (or Ben Sira/Sirach), and the Wisdom of Solomon. We should note that “Ecclesiasticus” and “The Wisdom of Solomon” are among the seven books that Protestants have excluded from their Bibles, designating them as “apocryphal.”

Do not be intimidated by what Protestants say. For Paul writes to Timothy: “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

### 1. Hebrew and Greek Definitions of “Psalm.”

The Book of Psalms derives from the Hebrew word “*Tehillim*” (תְּהִלִּים). This word signifies praise, songs of praise, or hymns addressed to God.

The noun is *Tehillim* (תְּהִלִּים). However, the Hebrew verb is “*Halal*” (לָלַחַ), meaning “to praise, celebrate, glorify, and exalt God.”

It is from this root that the word “Alleluia” (*Hallelu-Yah*) derives, meaning “Praise the Lord” or “Praise Yahweh.”

The word “psalm” derives from the Greek word *Ψαλμός* (*Psalmos*)—a singular form—which means “a psalm.” *Ψαλμοί* (*Psalmoi*)—in the plural—means “the psalms” or “several psalms.”

This word derives from the Greek verb *Psallō* (ψάλλω), which originally meant to touch the strings of an instrument, to play the harp or lyre, and to sing with musical accompaniment. Thus, a psalm is a sacred song, accompanied by a stringed instrument, intended for prayer and worship.

### 2. The Authors of the Book of Psalms

According to tradition, King David is the principal author of the Psalms. However, the Levites—specifically the sons of Asaph, who were responsible for singing and musical accompaniment—likely played a significant role in composing or selecting the Psalms.

### 3. The Five Books of Psalms

The division of the Book of Psalms into five distinct books holds great significance in both Jewish and Christian traditions. This structure is no mere coincidence; it is grounded in historical, liturgical, theological, and symbolic considerations. The Book of Psalms is often called the Psalter, or “the Prayer of Israel.” Jewish tradition regarded the psalms as a “second Torah”—a Torah of prayer. This is one of the primary reasons the psalms are organized into five books. As the Rabbis

observed: “Moses gave the five books of the Law to Israel; David gave the five books of the Psalms. Thus, the Torah teaches us how to live, while the psalms teach us how to pray.”

### **3.1 Book I**

Psalms 1–41 constitute a single, unified section. The thematic focus here is on the righteous individual, personal struggle, trust, and one's relationship with God.

### **3.2 Book II**

Psalms 42–72 form a distinct section that emphasizes themes of hope, kingship, and trust.

### **3.3 Book III**

Psalms 73–89 form another section that emphasizes crisis, national suffering, and Covenant-related issues. This is the darkest part of the Psalms.

### **3.3 Book IV**

Psalms 90–106 form a coherent unit that highlights God's eternal reign, hope, and divine faithfulness.

### **3.5 Book V**

Psalms 107–150 form a coherent unit, emphasizing praise, thanksgiving, and spiritual victory.

Dear parishioners, this article aims to help you understand the structure of the Book of Psalms so you can read it more clearly. It is truly marvelous that the Book of Psalms begins with “The Way of the Righteous” (Psalm 1) and ends with “Universal Praise” (Psalm 150). Thus, it represents the believer's complete spiritual journey toward God.

Thank you, everyone, for taking the time to read the parish bulletin. We will see you again for the next article in this series on the Book of Psalms. “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord” (Psalm 150:6)!

Your Brother, Frantzcy Mahotiere

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