



## The book of Psalms

### *DID YOU KNOW?*

1. The term « Psalm » is derived from the Greek word *psalmos*, which means *a poem sung with musical instruments*. It appears in the Greek New Testament in 1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16. *Sepher, Tehillim*, the Hebrew title of this book, is translated as *Book of Praises*.
2. 73 Psalms are attributed to David, 12 to Asaph (50; 73-83), 2 to Solomon (72, 127), 1 to Moses (90), 1 to Etham (89) and 12 to the sons of Korah, a family of Levitical singers (42-49; 84; 85; 87, 88). These Psalms celebrate God's works in the past and what he will accomplish in the future; they emphasize his sovereignty and goodness, and the need for his constant presence.
3. Several the Psalms celebrate creation and other past events; one section is essentially historical, Psalms 104 – 106, beginning with the origins of the world and moving on to the captivity narrative. One can also note the nature of certain Psalms dedicated to the past or future glory of Jerusalem and its Temple (mainly Ps. 48, 84, 122, 132).
4. 7 Psalms are called Psalms of repentance (6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143), 15 Psalms are designated as « Pilgrim Psalms » or « Songs of Ascents » (120 – 134). The best known of the Psalms of praise is Psalm 136, while Psalm 119 is the most magnificent hymn to the Word of God; but Palms 111 - 113 and 115 – 117 constitute the great Hallelujah, sometimes called Hallel.
5. The Psalms contain many Messianic prophecies; they depict Christ in his sufferings (22, 69), his second coming (50, 97, 98), and his reign (2; 21; 45; 72). The New Testament quotes more often than any other chapter of the Old Testament the short Psalm 110, which portrays Christ as Son of God and Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. The New Testament writings include 186 quotations from the Psalms.
6. The points of view in the psalms are diverse. They reflect the different personalities who have contributed their poems and prayers over many centuries. However, readers have found a consistency in them. They can go from one psalm to another without being aware of the time gap between the different psalms. Some have called the psalms a bible within the Bible – different books narrating the same story.
7. God is not the sole presence in the book of Psalms. There are also enemies with sarcastic sneers who inflict suffering and prepare for violence. These enemies appear in nearly every

psalm. According to the psalmists, faith in God is a strength in the fight against powers that often seem more real than God.

8. The authors of the psalms often asked these questions: Where are you, God? Why don't you help me? Despite their love for God, they often felt abandoned and exploited. They did not find any assurance of security in their relationship with God. The abundance of joy and praise in these prayers comes not from the absence of difficulties, but from the deep conviction that the mighty God would overcome these problems.
9. Many of the psalms touch people so deeply that one cannot help but be moved. However, not all the psalms are captivating. In some of them, the tone is harsh, dull, or denotes complacency. It will not be easy to pray with these passages if they are not taken in context and understood.
10. Unlike traditional French poems, the original Hebrew texts of these poems were probably devoid of rhyme and rhythm. Rather, the approach here was one of parallelism, where one rhyming thought followed another that was contradictory to it. Fortunately, this type of poem can be translated into almost any language without loss of meaning.
11. Some psalms invoke God's wrath and judgment on enemies. They contain prayers addressed to God that those who commit evil will suffer because of their actions. These psalms are called « imprecatory psalms ». (E.g., Ps. 7, 35, 55, 59, 69, 79, 109, 139, etc.).
12. The book of Psalms is the most quoted Old Testament book by New Testament writers. It is quoted 116 times. For example, Psalm 110, which is the most quoted in the New Testament in reference to Jesus Christ as the great King and High Priest, is quoted about 25 times.
13. Some of Jesus' actions and the Pharisees' feeling of hatred towards him were already predicted in some passages of the Psalms (Ps. 35:19; 41:10; 69:10, 22). In addition, the resurrection of Jesus was predicted in Psalm 16, verse 10.
14. The psalms were one big book with five different collections. These parts are classified as follows: first book, second book, etc., each ending with a praise. Some passages are repeated at several levels: Psalm 14 in the first book is the same as Psalm 53 in the second book. Psalm 70 (second book) is a portion of Psalm 46 (first book) and Psalm 108 (fourth book) is an amalgamation of portions of Psalms 57 and 60.
15. Not all psalms have a happy ending. Some, like Psalms 39, 44 and 88, show deep sadness. The psalmists try to understand the reason for suffering, but without success. They call on God for help in vain. The presence in the Bible of texts that echo such cries of despair attests to the fact that God allows human suffering.

16. During the years when David was considered an outlaw by King Saul, his hiding place was a « rock » in the desert (1 S. 23:25-28) and a « fortress » (1 S. 22:4). David was an experienced warrior and knew the value of these walls. He recognized, however, that he owed his security to God, the true rock and unshakable fortress. (Ps. 62:7)
17. Most of the psalms sung in the temple were for worship. But it is difficult to say how it was done. This passage (Ps. 68:24-25) tells us a great deal about the use of the psalms in the processions leading to the temple. They were probably first sung when David brought the Ark – the symbol of God’s presence – to Jerusalem. (2 S. 6 :1; 1 Ch. 15:16)
18. Psalm 69 was repeated many times in the New Testament as a prediction of the coming of Jesus. « The zeal for your house consumes me » for example is quoted in John 2:17 when Jesus drove the moneychangers out of the temple. Romans 15:3 used Ps. 69:9 (or verse 10 in other versions) to point to Jesus’ self-denial.
19. Psalm 88 is the last of the twelve psalms attributed to the “sons of Korah”. The latter, who was insubordinate to the authority of Moses, died in his rebellion (No. 16). His children were spared and several years later David chose members of their tribe to serve as singers (1Ch. 6:31-37). Likely, these psalms were part of a song repertoire used by these musicians.
20. In Psalm 90, man’s frailty is contrasted with God’s glory, and in Psalm 91, God’s protection is highlighted.
21. Israel experienced one of its worst nightmares in Massah and Meribah. Because of their lack of faith, God made them wander in the desert for forty years. Now, centuries later, Psalm 95 warns another generation of Israelites not to repeat the same mistake that led their ancestors to miss God’s rest.
22. Psalm 104 praises God for all the parts of nature. The Lord is praised even for the presence of creatures such as wild goats, lions and Leviathan or sea monster. The Israelites, shepherds and peasants only saw the good side of these animals. But for the poet who wrote Psalm 104, creatures that are of no "use" still have intrinsic value - especially in the eyes of God.
23. Jesus, in conversing with the Pharisees (Mark 12:36), refers to David by quoting Psalm 110, verse one. Some of Jesus’ words at the cross are direct quotes from the book of Psalms (Ps. 22:1; 31:5).
24. It was common practice to sing Psalms 113 – 118 during the Passover meals - the first two before the meal and the other four after. These hymns are most likely the last ones sung by Jesus and his disciples before his death. (Mark 14:26)
25. Psalm 119 is a special poem. It develops a certain form from beginning to end. It is called an acrostic. Each line of each strophe begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, A for the first strophe, B for the second, and C, until the end of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

The theme, however, remains the greatest attraction. Psalm 119 is a long poem of great passion for the law of God.

26. Psalms 120 - 134 should be called « Psalms of Ascent ». The term « ascent » is the correct interpretation of the Hebrew word translated as « degrees ». According to some commentators, these psalms were sung by the Israelites ascending to Jerusalem on their return from the Babylonian captivity, or by the worshippers who came from all parts of Palestine to ascend to the holy city for the celebration of the great festivals. (De. 16:16)
27. According to one interpretation, the 15 references to the « Song of the Ascents » refer to the 15 steps leading up to the Temple court of Israel, where these Psalms were sung.
28. If the « law of the Lord » can be summarized in the Ten Commandments, it also includes all revealed divine truth. In David's day it was the Pentateuch and some historical books; today it is the complete Bible. Furthermore, « Fear of the Lord » is an Old Testament expression that means respectful trust and implying hatred of evil.
29. The psalms known as « Hallelujah » are listed below: Psalms 104-106; 111-113; 115-117; 135-136; 146-150. Of these, Psalms 135-136 and 146-150 were performed during the daily worship service in the synagogue. The word « Alléluia » is the Greek transcription of the Hebrew « Hallelujah » (Rev. 19:1, 3) which means « Praise the Lord ».
30. It is surprising to hear that there are psalms of cursing. Psalm 137 is the best-known example. In a beautiful lament written from the exile, the poet does not hesitate at the end of this psalm of sorrow to express a wish to God, that he would bless anyone who would kill any Babylonian child. To many people, this wish seems very hideous for being part of the Bible.
31. The psalms of curses depict how the Israelites fell prey to the monstrosity, violence and injustice of others. Unless one understands the depth of these psalms, one cannot perceive the fullness of God's mercy, freely given to anyone who pleads for forgiveness. God is not content simply to grant clemency on a point of law. He hears the pain of their victims and more than that, he feels it.
32. The New Testament quotes two of the psalms of cursing with reference to Jesus, betrayed by Judah. These psalms reveal a blatant injustice. Jesus himself suffered extreme injustice. But the final words come from Jesus himself: « Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. » (Luke 23:34)
33. The psalms are divided into five collections but cover various themes. Here are some examples: nature (Ps. 19, 65, 104, 147, 148); a cry for help in distress (Ps. 5, 17, 25, 31, 60); prayers for forgiveness and help (6, 32, 38, 51, 143); praises for blessings in one's life (Ps. 18, 30, 34, 40, 92, 103, 107, 113, 116, 118, 146); the Messiah (Ps. 2, 16, 22, 45, 69, 89, 110, 132); the way of the wicked and the just (Ps. 1, 15, 37, 49)

34. The last collection of the Book of psalms is composed entirely of psalms of praise. It is thus with a praise in which the whole soul adores and blesses that this collection of prayers ends, where it echoes the struggles, the sufferings, and the triumphant faith of the people of God. All the tears, as well as all the joys of Israel, lead to full praise. Only praise will remain and overflow.
  
35. Psalm 150 is like a brilliant final chorus, full of power and energy. It is a final general invitation to praise the Lord, in freedom in his holy place with all the instruments of the temple, as well as for his mighty acts and for the extent of his greatness. This is what this psalm reminds us of, in its brevity, leading to the final word: Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! (verse 6).