

BIBLE OVERVIEW – OLD TESTAMENT

5. Poets and Sages (The Covenant celebrated and practised)

Psalms + Wisdom Literature (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes) = over 14% of the OT .

Psalms - poetry; Wisdom Literature - poetry (mainly) in Job and aphorisms (witty sayings) in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

The Psalms lyrics as well as poetry. Similarities with other worship songs of ANE (e.g. Babylonia). Wisdom literature – similarities with wisdom literature of Egypt. Yet both are distinctive because they focus on the celebration and practice of the covenant between the LORD and his people.

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

‘Wisdom’ (Hebrew: *Chokmah*; Greek: *Sophia*)

x 37 in Proverbs.

‘Skilfulness in dealing with the job that is before us – life itself.’ (Charles Johnson)

- 1.2-4: ‘prudence to the simple (an ordinary person, CEV) and knowledge and discretion to the young’. For skinheads as well as eggheads!
- 1.7 ‘The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge’

Outline of the Book

- Speeches 1-9
- Sayings 10-31

‘The Sophia Course’

1.20 - at street level! It deals with sound judgment about gang violence, sexual adventurism, work and work shyness, wealth and poverty, responding to the poor, making business plans and decisions, government, family, anger, etc. .

Chapters 8 and 9. Lady Wisdom & Dame Folly!

THE BOOK OF PSALMS

A. *How do we classify?*

Five Books

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)

Two basic types

- Praises and
- Prayers

Over Seven different sub-types

		Hymns	<	Songs of Zion
	/			Psalms of Yahweh's Kingship
• Praises	-	Temple Entry		
	\			Individual
		Songs of Thanksgiving	<	Communal
	/	Individual Prayers		Laments
• Prayers	-			
	\			Laments
		Corporate Prayers	<	Royal Psalms
• Psalms of Instruction				

HYMNS (or Psalms of Praise) – *Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised!* (145.1) 8; 29; 33; 65; 66; 68; 75; 78; 81; 92; 95; 100; 103; 104; 105; 107; 111; 113; 114; 115; 117; 118; 135; 136; 145; 147; 148; 149; 150. Some hymns contain prophetic oracles (75.2-5; 81.6-16; 95.8-11).

- Songs of Zion – *The LORD has chosen Zion:* 46; 48; 76; 84; 87; cf 132.13-18.
- Psalms of Yahweh's kingship – *The LORD reigns:* 47; 93; 96; 97; 98; 99.

TEMPLE ENTRY SONGS - *LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary?* (15.1) 5; 15; 24; 26; 28; 36; 52

SONGS OF THANKSGIVING – *Give thanks to the LORD for he is good; his love endures for ever.*

- Individual: 30; 32; 34; 116; 138; cf also 40.1-10; 66.13-20; 118.5-18, 21, 28.
- Communal: 107; 124

PRAYERS

- Individual – *Answer me when I call to you:* (4.1) 3; 4; 6; 7; 13; 17; 22; 25; 27; 31; 35; 38; 39; 40; 41; 42-43; 51; 54; 55; 56; 57; 59; 61; 64; 69; 70; 71; 77; 86; 88; 102; 109; 139; 140; 141; 142; 143.
- Communal – *You have rejected and humbled us* (44.9): 9-10; 12; 14; 44; 53; 58; 60; 67; 74; 79; 80; 82; 83; 85; 89 (also a royal psalm); 90; 94; 106; 108; 126; 137; 144.
- Royal Psalms – *O LORD, save the king* (20.9): 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89.

PSALMS OF INSTRUCTION (or Wisdom and Torah Psalms) - *Come my children, listen to me; and I will teach you the fear of the LORD* (34.11): 1, 19, 37, 49, 73, 112, 119

Notes

Psalms of Praise

There is both descriptive and declarative praise. *Descriptive* praise focuses on who God is; *declarative* praise on what God has done.

Psalms of Trust

Some psalms are given this classification: 11; 16; 23; 62; 63; 91.

Songs of Thanksgiving

They constitute the other side of the Prayer psalms.

Prayers

In some of the individual prayers (4; 25; 57; 61; 64; 139) the speaking 'I' may be a representative of the congregation in a regular service rather than a lone individual in a special crisis. Some reflect corporate concerns, e.g. social unrest (59; 64; 140) and the exile (77; 102), and may have been used corporately.

Laments

They move from complaint to petition to praise. Ps. 88 is the only exception. There is the 'I-lament', the 'God-lament' and the 'foe-lament'.

- Songs of Pain - *Hear me and answer me... for they [the wicked] bring down suffering upon me and revile me in their anger:* 55 & many of the prayers.
- Songs of Blame (or of the falsely accused) – *May my vindication come from you!:* 7; 17
- Songs of Shame – *Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity :* 6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143.
- Songs of Enmity – *For the curses and lies they utter, consume them in wrath, consume them until they are no more* (59.12-13): 55; 59; 83; 109; 137; etc.

Royal Psalms

The prescribed ideal to which the kings should aspire. Cf the described reality of 1 & 2 Kings! The very failure of most Davidic kings intensified these prayers for the Messiah in whom these hopes and prayers would one day be fulfilled. Typology.

B. How do we use?

Focus on use rather than origin!

Note the open-ended language.

Why use the psalms (as songs and prayers)?

- | | |
|--|---------------------------|
| • For worship – Bk of Praises (Heb title). | Seeing God's face. |
| • For learning – Torah. | Hearing God's words |
| • For meditation – Ps. 1.2; 39.3 | Responding to God's grace |

Remember the psalms are poetry – they are designed to speak to your emotion as well as to your mind! Allow the graphic metaphors and the linguistic hyperbole to engage your right brain!

Additional Notes

Subject and Object

A change from ‘I’ to ‘we’ suggests a change of speaker.

A shift from ‘you’ to ‘he’ (referring to God) indicates a move from prayer to testimony.

The ‘righteous’ and the ‘wicked’.

These terms may be used as character profiles: ‘They are not descriptive reports; they are prescriptive models.’ (Craig G. Broyles). Self-declarations as ‘righteous’ are not smug expressions of boasting; nor are they claims to perfection. Rather they are claims by the speakers to be sincerely seeking to fulfil the demands of the LORD’s covenant. They were identifying themselves with, and aspiring to, the model of the righteous in contrast to the model of ‘the wicked’ (those within the covenant community who were careless and insincere about their covenant obligations).

Authorship

The title ‘A Psalm of David’ is doubly ambiguous. First, the Hebrew ‘of’ can also mean ‘to’ and ‘for’. Second, ‘David’ can refer to the historical individual or to a later Davidic king (as in Jer. 30.9; Ezek. 34.23-24; 37.24-25; Hos. 3.5). So this title could mean:

- (1) ‘of’ or ‘(belonging) to’ David in the sense of authorship.
- (2) ‘(dedicated) to’ David or to the Davidic king of the time (like a book dedication)
- (3) ‘for (the use of)’ David or the Davidic king
- (4) ‘(belonging) to’ the Psalter, as in Hebrews 4.7

Psalms of Enmity

These psalms are frequently misunderstood. The emotions expressed were undoubtedly real – the psalmists did hate the enemies in view. But the key point is that in expressing this in their prayer they were handing their hate for specific people over to God and asking him to execute judgment. Vengeance is his, not the psalmist’s! These psalms are essentially non-violent in practice, however violent their language.