

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

Bereans Adult Bible Fellowship
Placerita Baptist Church
2008

by
William D. Barrick, Th.D.
Professor of OT, The Master's Seminary




The Five Books of Psalms: Seams in the Garment of Praise

1.0 Introduction

- The division of the Book of Psalms into five books is ancient — dating back before the completion of the Old Testament in approximately 400 B.C.
 - ✓ Some psalms are repeated in different books:
 - Psalms 14 (Book 1) and 53 (Book 2)
 - Psalms 40 (Book 1) and 70 (Book 2)
 - Psalms 57:8-12 and 60:7-14 (Book 2) and 108 (Book 5)
 - ✓ Book 2 concludes with a notice that might have concluded the original Davidic collection (Ps 72:20 — “The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended”).
 - ✓ Second Chronicles 29:30 (“Moreover, King Hezekiah ... ordered the Levites to sing praise to the LORD with the words of David and Asaph the seer”) could be a reference to the Davidic collection in Books 1 and 2 and the Asaph collection in Book 3.
 - ✓ First Chronicles 16:35-36 appears to be a quote from Psalm 106:47-48, showing that the doxology at the end of Book 4 already may have been in place in the time of David. This psalm in 1 Chronicles 16:8-36 was composed by David from several different psalms (Pss 96, 105, and 106) and given to Asaph for use in the Temple (1 Chron 16:7).

2.0 Themes and Types

 Book 1 (Psalms 1–41): The glory years of the Davidic kingdom.

Authors		Names of God		Psalm Types	Themes
David:	37	LORD:	278x	25 laments	Two ways: godly/ungodly. Troubles of God's people. Faith & trust in the LORD. Prayer
Jeduthun:	1	God (Elohim):	49x	7 hymns	

 Book 2 (Psalms 42–72): The troubled years of the Davidic kingdom.

Authors		Names of God		Psalm Types	Themes
David:	18	LORD:	32x	17 laments	Troubles of God's people. Faith & trust in the LORD. God, our refuge. The LORD is King & Judge. Prayer
Sons of Korah:	7	God (Elohim):	198x	5 hymns	
Asaph:	1				
Solomon	1				
Jeduthun:	1				

The first two books of the Psalter focus on the promise made to David in 2 Samuel 7:8-16 and the hope of its fulfillment.

 Book 3 (Psalms 73–89): The breaking of the Davidic dynasty's power.

Authors		Names of God		Psalm Types	Themes
Asaph:	11	LORD:	34x	10 laments	God is King & Judge. God's mercies for Israel in spite of her rebellion. Prayer for Israel's restoration. God's covenant. Forgiveness.
Sons of Korah:	3 ^a	God (Elohim):	63x	3 hymns	
David:	1				
Jeduthun:	1				
Heman:	1 ^a				
Ethan:	1 ^b				

^a The heading for Psalm 88 includes both “the sons of Korah” and “Heman.” The part of the heading with “the sons of Korah” probably should be taken as the musical subscription for Psalm 87, a psalm whose literary heading already identifies “the sons of Korah.”


^b In this third book of the Psalter, all of the Levitical singers mentioned in the Book of Chronicles composed psalms.

The third book of the Psalter opens with a complaint about the success of the wicked and closes with a complaint that the promise made to David in 2 Samuel 7:8-16 has not yet been fulfilled.

 Book 4 (Psalms 90–106): History of Israel from the Exodus onward.

Authors		Names of God		Psalm Types	Themes
David:	2	LORD:	115x	2 laments	The LORD is King. Israel’s praise. Experiencing God’s grace & mercy. Salvation. Prayer.
Moses:	1	God (Elohim):	24x	11 hymns	

The fourth book of the Psalter commences with the “Prayer of Moses” (Ps 90) and concludes with two historical psalms (Pss 105 and 106). Book 4’s theme is primarily that of the sovereignty of God—He always has been, is, and always will be in control—even in view of the failure of the Davidic dynasty as lamented in Psalm 89.

 Book 5 (Psalms 107–150): Babylonian Exile, restoration, and beyond.

Authors		Names of God		Psalm Types	Themes
David:	15	LORD:	236x	15 pilgrim songs	The Word of God. The LORD’s steadfast love. Zion & God’s presence. Salvation. Thanksgiving. The world’s praise. Prayer.
Solomon:	1	God (Elohim):	31x	5 “Hallelujah” psalms	

- Book 5 represents a carefully chosen conclusion to the Psalter with a focus on the unfolding drama of redemption, returning to the covenant Name and psalms by David.

3.0 Relationship to David

- Books 1–3 are a Davidic macro-collection:

	David	Korah	Asaph
Book 1	Psalms 3–41	—	—
Book 2	Psalms 51–65; 68–70	Psalms 42–49	Psalm 50
Book 3	Psalm 86	Psalms 84–85; 87–88	Psalms 73–83

- Messianic psalms have been placed at key locations in all three books:

Book	Messianic Psalm
1	Begins with Psalm 2
2	Ends with Psalm 72
3	Ends with Psalm 89