

The Prayers of the People

Reflections on the Psalms

“In the Psalms, the human soul extends itself beyond its confining, sheltering, impermanent house of clay. It strives for contact with the Ultimate Source of all life. It gropes for an experience of the divine Presence. The biblical psalms are essentially a record of the human quest for God.”

Nahum Sarna, *On the Book of Psalms*

“Through the ages, Psalms has been the most urgently, personally present of all the books of the Bible in the lives of many readers. Both Jewish and Christian tradition made it part of the daily and weekly liturgy. Untold numbers have repeatedly turned to Psalms for encouragement and comfort in moments of crisis or despair.”

Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms*

“Son, all the books of Scripture, both the Old Testament and the New, are inspired by God and useful for instruction, as the Apostle says; but to those who really study it the Psalter yields special treasure. Each book of the Bible has, of course, its own particular message Each of these books, you see, is like a garden which grows one special kind of fruit; by contrast, the Psalter is a garden which, besides its special fruit, grows also some of all the rest.”

*Athanasius, To Marcellinus on The
Interpretation of the Psalms*

The Arrangement of the Psalms

- Book 1: 1-41
- Book 2: 42-72
- Book 3: 73-89
- Book 4: 90-106
- Book 5: 107-150

Doxological Codas

- 41:13 (14) *Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen.*
- 72:18-19 *Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name for ever; may his glory fill the whole earth! Amen and Amen.*
- 89:52 (53) *Blessed be the Lord for ever! Amen and Amen.*
- 106:48 *Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! And let all the people say, "Amen!" Praise the Lord!*

Genres & Functions

- Genres: Hymns: Praise/Thanksgiving, Wisdom, Royal/Messianic, Supplication, Historical, Lament/Complaint, Liturgical
- Functions
 - Devotional
 - Formational
 - Liturgical

Canonical Context of Psalms

- TaNaK=Law, Prophets, Writings
- Law: Genesis 1 – *In the beginning . . . And God said . . .*
- Prophets: Joshua 1
- Writings: Psalm 1

Prophets & Writings: Joshua 1/Psalm 1

Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the **law** that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This Book of the **Law** shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall **meditate on it day and night**, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will **make your way prosperous**, and then you will have good success.

Joshua 1:7-8 ESV

but his delight is in the **law** of the LORD, and **on his law he meditates day and night**. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he **prosperes**.

Psalm 1:2-3 ESV

Blessed is the man
 who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
 nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
 and on his law he meditates day and night.

He is like a tree
 planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
 and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.
The wicked are not so,
 but are like chaff which the wind drives away.

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
 nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
 but the way of the wicked will perish.

Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together,
against the LORD and his Anointed, saying,
“Let us burst their bonds asunder and cast their cords from us.”

He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord has them in derision.
Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying,
“I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.”

I will tell of the decree of the LORD:
He said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you.
Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,
and the ends of the earth your possession.
You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.”

Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth.
Serve the LORD with fear, with trembling kiss his feet [kiss the Son].
lest he be angry, and you perish in the way,
for his wrath is quickly kindled.
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

(Psalm 2 RSV)