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A Condensation of the Psalms

The book of Psalms is a beautiful collection of lyric poetry whose title signifies “praises.” Many of these psalms, set to music, became the hymnbook of the Hebrew nation. They range in authorship from Moses (Ps. 90) and David to the psalmists of the Restoration period, and cover in time close to a thousand years of Israel’s history. This collection was early divided into five sections: Pss. 1–41, 42–72, 73–89, 90–106, 107–150, each closing with a doxology. Of its 150 psalms, 75 are attributed to David or compiled in his name. The Hallel (“praise”), Pss. 113–118, was sung at the Passover, Feast of Weeks, and Feast of Tabernacles. Songs of Degrees or Ascents, Pss. 120–134, were sung by pilgrims journeying to Jerusalem for the annual festivals.

The Psalms rehearse continually the blessings of God’s love to Israel. They are the passionate outpourings of the human heart in praise and trust to an omniscient God; the devotional prayers of the penitent, the doubtful, the fearful who sought comfort, guidance, and protection; the supplications of the godly and the upright who walked in integrity and craved deliverance from sin and the wickedness of men. And they reveal the profound meditations of those who loved the law of God and strove to obey its precepts.

Throughout the Psalms the voice of prophecy is heard, portraying Christ in his sufferings, resurrection, ascension, church, and kingdom. Those considered peculiarly Messianic are Pss. 2, 16, 22, 40, 45, 69, 72, 110, and 118, but in many others may be seen the pattern of the Godlike man that is fulfilled in Jesus Christ (see Lu. 24:44).

To observe the main theme of each poem is to see Psalms as “a mirror of the life of the soul, not of Israel merely, but of humanity.”¹ Because these poems are cries of the soul to God out of the depths of human anguish, and songs from the heights of pure joy and inspiration, they touch a responsive chord in every one of us. “The Psalms should be studied in the light of eternal truth, and the local significance should be lost in the universal.”²

The substance of each psalm has been pointed up to enable the reader to see quickly its timeless truths so applicable to present-day experience. The psalms have been arranged in groups of ten for convenient reading. An asterisk (*) indicates a psalm written by or attributed to David.

- PSALM 1. The happiness of the godly. The unhappiness of the ungodly.
- PSALM 2. God's Anointed (Christ) to reign over the whole earth with an iron rod.
- *PSALM 3. The security of God's protection.
- *PSALM 4. The godly man's happiness and safety are secure in God.
- *PSALM 5. God does not show favor to the wicked, but blesses and defends the righteous.
- *PSALM 6. A prayer for mercy and healing in time of affliction.
- *PSALM 7. Prayer of a man of integrity for deliverance from his enemies.
- *PSALM 8. God's excellent glory is magnified by His works. Man is crowned with glory, honor, and dominion.
- *PSALM 9. A song of praise for God's righteous judgment.
- *PSALM 10. Prayer for surcease from grievous ways of the wicked.
- *PSALM 11. A prayer of trust in God in time of trial.
- *PSALM 12. Prayer of entreaty for God's help when the wicked walk on every side.
- *PSALM 13. A prayer of trust in divine mercy, though the answer be delayed.
- *PSALM 14. The corruption of the foolish man.
- *PSALM 15. Description of a righteous man, a dweller in Zion.
- *PSALM 16. Supplication to God for preservation. The godly man's heritage of joy and everlasting life (see Acts 2:25–31).
- *PSALM 17. A confident prayer of an innocent heart for God's protection.
- *PSALM 18. A song of thanksgiving for God's deliverance and mercy.
- *PSALM 19. God's works show His glory, His perfect law, His grace.
- *PSALM 20. A prayer of faith in God's help and salvation.
- *PSALM 21. A king's joyous prayer of thanksgiving for God's many blessings.
- *PSALM 22. A cry of distress, yet of sublime trust in God (see Mt. 27:46).
- *PSALM 23. The great Shepherd and His loving constant care.
- *PSALM 24. God's sovereignty. The pure in heart dwell in His holy place.
- *PSALM 25. A confident prayer for forgiveness, mercy, and deliverance.
- *PSALM 26. A declaration of integrity and a prayer for redemption.
- *PSALM 27. Fearless faith upheld by the power and goodness of God.
- *PSALM 28. An earnest prayer for help. Rejoicing in God's answer.
- *PSALM 29. The majesty, power, and glory of the voice of God.
- *PSALM 30. Thanksgiving for healing and deliverance from death.
- *PSALM 31. Confident prayer in time of trouble. God's mercy and goodness.
- *PSALM 32. The blessedness of God's forgiveness of sins.
- PSALM 33. The upright shall praise God's goodness and creative power.
- *PSALM 34. God is to be praised and trusted. Preservation of the righteous.
- *PSALM 35. Prayer of a righteous man for his enemies' confusion.
- *PSALM 36. The transgressions of the wicked. The excellence of God's loving-kindness to the upright in heart.
- *PSALM 37. The transitory estate of the wicked and his end. The patience and preservation of the righteous and his end.
- *PSALM 38. A submissive prayer for mercy under chastisement for sin.

*PSALM 39. The vanity of mortal life. Hope in God.

*PSALM 40. The blessings of trust in God. Obedience to His will is the rightful sacrifice (see Heb. 10:7).

*PSALM 41. Prayer to God for succor from suffering and from malice of enemies.

PSALM 42. The thirst of the soul for the living God.

PSALM 43. A prayer for light and truth and God's guidance.

PSALM 44. A prayer for deliverance by a faithful nation under reproach.

PSALM 45. A song of rejoicing over the King's marriage (see Rev. 19:7, 8).

PSALM 46. God is the refuge and strength of His people.

PSALM 47. Praise to God, the enthroned King of all the earth.

PSALM 48. The everlasting glory of Zion, the city of God.

PSALM 49. Folly of trusting in riches for redemption of the soul.

PSALM 50. The true spirit of sacrifice, which God enjoys.

*PSALM 51. The confession of a contrite heart; a prayer for forgiveness of sins, for purity, and for restoration to grace.

*PSALM 52. The boastful, deceitful wicked are destroyed, while the righteous abide.

*PSALM 53. The folly and corruption of men who say there is no God.

*PSALM 54. Prayer for help and defense against enemies who oppress.

*PSALM 55. Mourning over the treachery of a friend. Comfort in prayer and in certainty of God's care.

*PSALM 56. Complete trust and reliance on God in time of fear.

*PSALM 57. A fixed faith in God's mercy and truth amid calamities.

*PSALM 58. Prayer for destruction of unjust judges that God's judgment may be manifest.

*PSALM 59. Prayer for deliverance from enemies. God a sure defense.

*PSALM 60. A prayer for God's presence and help in battle.

*PSALM 61. A prayer of confidence in God and a vow to serve Him continually.

*PSALM 62. God is the rock of man's salvation—his refuge and strong defense.

*PSALM 63. The soul that thirsts is satisfied in God; it joyfully praises Him.

*PSALM 64. Prayer for preservation from the secret devices of the wicked.

*PSALM 65. Praise for God's blessings and benefits to man and the earth.

PSALM 66. Praise and honor to God for His mighty works toward men.

PSALM 67. A prayer that all nations of the earth worship God.

*PSALM 68. Praise to "Jah" for the excellence and strength of His presence and for His gracious providence to Israel.

*PSALM 69. A cry for deliverance from the mire of grief and affliction over unmerited reproach (see Mt. 27:34, 48; Jn. 15:25).

*PSALM 70. A cry for speedy deliverance from the wicked.

PSALM 71. Prayer of an aged man for strength and quickening against the trials of old age. His hope and confident trust in God's deliverance.

*PSALM 72. Prayer for the righteous and enduring reign of the ideal King (Christ).

PSALM 73. The psalmist is tempted to envy the prosperity of the wicked; but his conclusion is "It is good for me to draw near to God."

PSALM 74. Prayer to God that He remember His covenant people and restore His holy sanctuary desolated by the adversary.

PSALM 75. Thanksgiving that God puts down the proud, exalts the righteous.

PSALM 76. An exhortation to revere God for His victorious judgments.

PSALM 77. A struggle to maintain faith. Comfort is found in remembering God's power and mercy.

PSALM 78. A new generation warned to be not stubborn or rebellious but to keep steadfastly God's law and covenant.

PSALM 79. A lament over the desolation of Jerusalem and a prayer for forgiveness and removal of reproach.

PSALM 80. Prayer to the great Shepherd of Israel for salvation.

PSALM 81. A call to praise and obey the God who has succored Israel, for His benefits fall not to the obstinately willful.

PSALM 82. A reproof of unjust judgment. Prayer for God's justice.

PSALM 83. A plea that God confound the enemies of Israel.

PSALM 84. The soul's longing to abide in the sanctuary of the living God.

PSALM 85. Prayer that God's mercy and salvation be shown to His people.

*PSALM 86. A trusting prayer for the continuance of God's mercies.

PSALM 87. A song of the glory of Zion and of those born in her.

PSALM 88. Supplication for deliverance from the darkness of death.

PSALM 89. Praise for the blessings and mercies of God's covenant, and prayer for their renewal in time of reproach.

PSALM 90. God's everlastingness and the fleeting days of a man.
Prayer to use the days wisely that the works of a man's hands may endure.

PSALM 91. The safety and security of him who trusts, whose habitation is "the secret place of the most High."

PSALM 92. Praise to the most High for His great works and for His goodness.

PSALM 93. A song of praise of God's majesty, power, and holiness.

PSALM 94. Prayer for God's vengeance on the wicked and His merciful upholding of the righteous.

PSALM 95. Praise to God for the works of His hands, and exhortation to harden not the heart against Him.

PSALM 96. A call to all nations to praise and honor God and to give to Him the glory due His righteous reign.

PSALM 97. Psalm of rejoicing that God is above all gods and that His righteousness is manifest.

PSALM 98. A song of rejoicing that all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of God.

PSALM 99. An exhortation to exalt God in Zion, for He is great and holy, and He answers prayer.

PSALM 100. A glad song of praise to God the Creator.

*PSALM 101. A vow to walk faithfully before God with a perfect heart.

PSALM 102. Prayer of one overwhelmed by affliction. He takes comfort in remembering the mercy and eternity of God.

*PSALM 103. A hymn of praise and gratitude for God's loving-kindness.

PSALM 104. Meditation on the manifold works of the Creator and His tender care over all.

PSALM 105. Rehearsal of God's blessings to Israel, His covenant people.

PSALM 106. Rehearsal of Israel's rebellions and God's deliverances.

PSALM 107. A call to praise God for His deliverance of the children of men from their many distresses.

*PSALM 108. A prayer of praise, and a plea to God whose help alone can bring victory over the enemy.

*PSALM 109. Prayer that the deceitful wicked be put to confusion.

*PSALM 110. The Priest-King and his reign (see Mt. 22:44; Heb. 5:6).

PSALM 111. An exhortation to praise God for His glorious and enduring works.

PSALM 112. The blessedness of the upright man who fears God.

PSALM 113. God is to be universally praised. His mercy to the poor.

PSALM 114. A hymn of praise for God's mighty deliverance of Israel.

PSALM 115. The omnipotence of God and the impotence of idols.

PSALM 116. Psalmist's gratitude to God for the deliverance of his soul from death. A profession of love and consecration.

PSALM 117. A call to the nations to praise God for His mercy.

PSALM 118. Praise for the saving and enduring goodness of God. The coming of Christ typified (see Mt. 21:9, 42).

PSALM 119. Prayerful joyful meditation on the law of God—His way, His word, His testimonies, precepts, statutes, commandments, judgments, and ordinances—and on the blessings which flow from obedience to them.

PSALM 120. Cry of distress for surcease from deceitful tongues.

PSALM 121. God the Creator is the keeper and preserver of His people.

*PSALM 122. A song of rejoicing for Jerusalem and a prayer for its peace.

PSALM 123. Confident prayer to God for deliverance from the scorn of men.

*PSALM 124. Thanksgiving to God for deliverance from enemies.

PSALM 125. God is round about those who trust Him.

PSALM 126. Joyous thanksgiving for restoration after captivity.

PSALM 127. All labor not of God is vain. Children are God's gift.

PSALM 128. The happiness of him who loves God and walks in His ways.

PSALM 129. Thankfulness to God that affliction has not prevailed.

PSALM 130. A supplicating cry for God's forgiving love, attended by hope and patience.

*PSALM 131. Childlike humility and trust in God.

PSALM 132. A prayer for God's favor to Zion, His chosen habitation.

*PSALM 133. Blessing on brethren who dwell together in unity.

PSALM 134. A call to those who watch in the sanctuary by night to bless God, and a prayer that God bless them.

PSALM 135. Praise to God for His mighty power. The vanity of idols.

PSALM 136. Praise to the God of gods "for his mercy endureth for ever."

PSALM 137. A psalm of mourning of those in captivity far from Zion.

*PSALM 138. Song of thanksgiving to God for answered prayer.

*PSALM 139. Song of praise to the omniscient and omnipresent Creator. Man the marvelous work of His hands.

*PSALM 140. Prayer for deliverance from the treachery of enemies.

*PSALM 141. The psalmist's supplication that his prayer be found worthy of acceptance, and that he be protected from the wicked.

*PSALM 142. A cry to God for refuge in time of trouble.

*PSALM 143. An earnest supplication for God's favor, guidance, and grace.

- *PSALM 144. Prayer that the mighty hand of God deliver His servant from the hand of wicked strangers.
- *PSALM 145. The goodness, greatness, and sure mercies of God are extolled. His kingdom is glorious and everlasting.
- PSALM 146. Song of praise to God, the true helper of men.
- PSALM 147. Praise to God, whose understanding and power are infinite.
- PSALM 148. The whole universe is exhorted to praise its Creator.
- PSALM 149. The children of Zion are exhorted to joy in their King, who beautifies the meek with salvation.
- PSALM 150. "Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord."

The burst of praise—the hallelujahs, "*praise ye Jah*"—of the closing psalm exhorts:

"Praise ye the Lord. Praise God. . . . Praise him. . . . Praise him. . . . Praise him. . . . Praise him. . . . Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord."

