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HOW TO UNDERSTAND AND APPLY
THE OLD TESTAMENT



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HOW TO UNDERSTAND AND APPLY THE OLD TESTAMENT

TWELVE STEPS FROM EXEGESIS TO THEOLOGY



Jason S. DeRouchie

FOREWORD BY D. A. CARSON

and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles” (26:22–23).

The Old Testament prophets anticipated the Messiah’s suffering and the mission it would spark. Because all the prophets point to Jesus, our interpretation of the prophetic books cannot end until we have discerned how each announces the Christ. This does not mean that every passage will point to the Messiah in the same way, but Jesus’ gospel work can and should be magnified from every prophetic text. Only in this way do the Prophets take their place as Christian Scripture. As you read the Prophets, seek to see and savor Christ and the gospel (see the section with a similar title in chapter 12).

Psalms

A Christian Approach to the Psalms



The book of Psalms contains some of the most familiar and well-loved parts of the Bible. By seeing only the initial words of the following verses, many readers can probably recite the entire passages by heart: “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” (Ps. 1:1–2). “O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth” (8:1[H2]).²⁹ “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul” (23:1–3).

Jesus loved the Psalter and often used it to defend his messiahship or to give voice to his pain. For example, in his dialogue with the chief priests and elders, Jesus identified himself as the suffering king of Psalm 118:22–23 when he questioned, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?’” (Matt. 21:42). Similarly, when engaging the Pharisees about the predicted Messiah and pushing them on their assertion that the Messiah was *David’s* son, Jesus referred to Psalm 110:1, asking, “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls [the Christ] Lord, saying, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet?’” (Matt. 22:43–44). Jesus saw Judas’s betrayal predicted in the Psalter (Ps. 41:9[H10]; John 13:18), and in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus appeared to allude to the words of the troubled king from Psalm 42:5–6[H6–7] (Matt. 26:38). At the cross he cried out,

29. The “H + number” in brackets refers to Hebrew verse numbers that differ from the English.

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?,” identifying the cries of the king in Psalm 22:1[H2] with his own (Matt. 27:46). His last words before his death, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” (Luke 23:46), declared as fulfilled the words of the king in Psalm 31:5[H6]. Jesus believed that the Psalms were about him, and it is from this context that he stressed after his resurrection that “everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and *the Psalms* must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44).

The apostles and New Testament authors, too, read the Psalms as supplying the laments, thanksgivings, and praises first of the Christ and then of all finding refuge in him (Ps. 2:12). They saw Jesus’ substitutionary death at the cross as the culmination of the nations’ and peoples’ rage against YHWH and his anointed king (Ps. 2:1–2; Acts 4:25–28). They believed that the Psalter predicted the cross’s graphic horror (Pss. 22:7[H8]; 109:25; Matt. 27:39), the taunting of the crowds (Ps. 22:8[H9]; Matt. 27:43), the dryness of Christ’s mouth (Ps. 22:15[H16]; John 19:28; cf. Ps. 69:21[H22]), the preservation of his bones (Ps. 34:20[H21]; John 19:36), Judas’s death (Pss. 69:25[H26]; 109:8; Acts 1:16, 20), and Jesus’ greeting of his “brothers” after his resurrection (Ps. 22:22[H23]; Heb. 2:12; cf. Matt. 28:10; Rom. 8:29). They also believed that Jesus’ bodily resurrection fulfilled the prophetic predictions that YHWH would preserve the anointed king’s body through death (Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:24–32; 13:35–37) and would exalt him as his royal “begotten Son” (Ps. 2:7; see Acts 13:32–33; cf. Rom. 1:4). In the end, Jesus (Rev. 12:5; 19:15) and those identified with him (2:26–27) will use “a rod of iron” to break the rebellious, plotting peoples (Ps. 2:9).

As Bruce Waltke has noted, “The writers of the New Testament are not attempting to identify and limit the psalms that prefigure Christ but rather are assuming that the Psalter as a whole has Jesus Christ in view and that this should be the normative way of interpreting the psalms.”³⁰ A Christian approach to the Psalms demands that we read the whole as messianic music, whether as songs “by Christ” or “about Christ.”³¹ And insofar as we identify ourselves with this Anointed One, his prayers become our prayers and his music our music.

Reading the Psalms as Messianic Music



It is important to recognize that the New Testament authors are not approaching the Psalms in a new way; they are simply following the pattern we see among the

30. Bruce K. Waltke, “A Canonical Process Approach to the Psalms,” in *Tradition and Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg*, ed. John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 7.

31. So Mark D. Futato, *Interpreting the Psalms: An Exegetical Handbook*, Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 174.

Prophets. For example, the prophet Zechariah alludes to Psalm 72 in a context saturated with messianic hope. Writing in a day when there was no Davidic king on the throne, Zechariah asserts in 9:9–10, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall *be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.*” John saw Jesus as fulfilling this text in his triumphal entry (John 12:14–16). The italicized portion parallels word for word Psalm 72:8, suggesting that Zechariah was reading this psalm as a prediction of the coming messianic king.

While the superscription of Psalm 72 attributes the prayer to Solomon, the body of the song has Israel’s ruler praying in hope for someone greater than himself, whose kingship far exceeds that of any Old Testament king.³² Psalm 72 is one of a host of *royal psalms* that display a portrait of an unparalleled coming deliverer (see Pss. 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 101, 110, 132, 144). Figure 1.10 summarizes the overall vision of this ruler in the Psalter’s royal psalms.³³

1.	He is not simply God’s “son” (89:27[H28]) but his “begotten” son (2:7), who belongs to YHWH (89:18[H19]) and remains ever devoted to him (18:20–24[H21–25]; 21:1, 7[H2, 8]; cf. 63:1–8, 11[H2–9, 12]); he is seated at God’s right hand (110:1) and is himself tagged both as “God” (45:6[H7]) and as David’s “Lord” (110:1); he will experience joy in God’s presence forever (21:6[H7]; cf. 16:11).
2.	He will receive YHWH’s everlasting blessing (21:6[H7]; 45:2[H3]; cf. 72:17), fulfill the Davidic covenant promises (89:28–37[H29–38]; 132:11–12, 17–18), and be the heir of both the nations (2:8) and the Melchizedekian priesthood (110:1–4).
3.	The nations and peoples of the earth stand against him (2:1–3; 110:2), but he will overcome all of them (45:3–5[H4–6]; 89:22–23[H23–24]; 110:1, 5–7; 132:18) through tribulation unto triumph (18:37–50[H38–51]; 20:1–9[H2–10]; 21:1, 4[H2, 5]; 144:7–8, 11), and he will declare God’s praises among them (18:49[H50]).

Fig. 1.10. The Portrait of the Messianic King in the Royal Psalms

32. We see the same pattern in Psalms 20–21, where the psalmist David prays on behalf of another—that YHWH would deliver his anointed king from his suffering (Ps. 20) and that God would be exalted for saving this king from death and establishing him with eternal days and blessing (Ps. 21). I suggest that the king for whom David prays is the one he later identifies as his “Lord” in Psalm 110:1 (cf. Matt. 22:41–46), whose personal pleas for God’s help are then disclosed in laments such as Psalm 22 and whose personal deliverance is celebrated in Psalm 23. For the view that the preposition לְ (“to”) + proper name (e.g., לְדָוִד “to David”) designates authorship, see GKC § 129c; for an overview of the various proposals, see Uriel Simon, *Four Approaches to the Book of Psalms: From Saadiah Gaon to Abraham Ibn Ezra*, trans. Lenn J. Schramm (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 179–82.

33. Some of this synthesis is adapted from J. Alec Motyer, *Look to the Rock: An Old Testament Background to Our Understanding of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 23–38.

4.	By YHWH's act (2:6, 8; 18:31–36, 43, 46–50[H32–37, 44, 47–51]; 21:1–13[H2–14]; 110:1–2; 132:17–18), he will establish global rule (2:8–12; 45:17[H18]; 72:8–11; 89:25[H26]; 110:5–6; 132:18) based in Zion (2:6; 110:2; 132:13, 17).
5.	He will reign forever (21:4[H5]; 45:6[H7]; 72:5) in peace (72:7) and fruitfulness (72:3, 16), and he will rule in righteousness and justice (45:4, 6–7[H5, 7–8]; 72:2–3; 101:1–8), which will include befriending the poor and defeating the oppressor (72:2, 4, 12–14).
6.	Those finding refuge in him will be blessed (2:12; 72:17; 144:15), and under his rule, they will flourish (72:7) and enjoy abundance (72:3; 144:13–15), being both prosperous (72:3) and fruitful (72:16; 144:12).
7.	He will possess an everlasting name (72:17), be preeminent among men (45:2, 7[H3, 8]), and stand as the object of unending thanks (72:15).

Fig. 1.10. The Portrait of the Messianic King in the Royal Psalms (cont.)

Zechariah’s messianic reading of Psalm 72 most likely aligns with its human author’s original intent, for clearly these royal psalms speak of no normal, fleshly king. Looking beyond himself, the speaker in Psalm 72 envisioned the fulfillment of YHWH’s royal ideal (Deut. 17:14–20) and his kingdom pledge to David (2 Sam. 7:12–16), which was itself built on the Lord’s promises in the Law to raise up an evil-overcoming, blessing-securing, royal deliverer, whose reign would last forever (Gen. 3:14–15; 22:17b–18; 49:8–10; Num. 24:7–9, 17–19). With every new generation there was hope that the next monarch would be the chosen one, but each Judaeen king proved that he was *not* the hoped-for Savior. Nevertheless, the community of faith continued to sing these psalms as a testament to his coming, and then the New Testament saints celebrated his arrival.

Zechariah does not appear to have been the first prophet to treat the Psalms messianically. Jeremiah, for example, seems to draw on Psalm 89 when he stresses in chapter 33 that the Davidic covenant is as firmly established as the day and night. In the psalm YHWH declares, “Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David. His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me. Like the moon it shall be established forever, a faithful witness in the skies” (Ps. 89:35–37[H36–38]). And Jeremiah states, “If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night will not come at their appointed time, then also my covenant with David my servant may be broken, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne” (Jer. 33:20–21; cf. 31:36–37).³⁴ Similarly, potentially

34. Along with 1–2 Samuel, Jeremiah witnesses major differences between the Masoretic Text (MT) and other texts and versions. In this instance, the LXX completely lacks Jeremiah 33:14–26, which does raise the possibility that the promises in this unit are not original to Jeremiah but arose later in the history of interpretation (so Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 3rd ed. [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011], 286–88). The Dead Sea Scroll 4QJerc does not preserve verses 16–20, and the size of the gap is too small to fit the entire text of the MT, so the scroll either included a shorter text at this point or had one or two words written above the line (so

declaring the fulfillment of YHWH's promise in Psalm 89:28[H29], "My steadfast love I will keep for [David] forever, and my covenant will stand firm for him," God declares to the faithful remnant through Isaiah, "I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David" (Isa. 55:3).³⁵ While YHWH's temporary punishment against the house of Judah made it appear that YHWH had forsaken his Davidic covenant promises (Ps. 89:38–46[H39–47]),³⁶ Psalm 89 testifies with later prophets that God would "not violate [his] covenant or alter the word that went forth from [his] lips" (89:34[H35]).³⁷

Not only Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah, but David himself, at least in certain instances, was consciously looking beyond himself, predicting the work of the Christ when he wrote his poetry. While not evident in the *ESV*, an alternative reading of 2 Samuel 23:1 finds David's last words standing as a prophetic oracle "*concerning the Messiah of the God of Jacob*."³⁸ This is the reading retained in the Septuagint, and it was followed by early English translations such as Douay-Rheims (1610) and the *YLT* (1898). Regardless of how one renders this statement, the only other occurrences of the phrase "the utterance of the mighty man" (נְאֻם הַגִּבּוֹר) are in Numbers 24:3, 15 and Proverbs 30:1, all of which introduce messianic oracles (see Num. 24:7, 17–19; Prov. 30:4).³⁹ Moreover, the content of David's "last words" clearly points beyond himself, speaking of one whose rule will bring forth light and new creation (2 Sam. 23:4) and who will overcome the man of worthlessness with an iron and wood spear (23:6–7), likely

Martin G. Abegg Jr., Peter Flint, and Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* [San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999], 401). Significantly, the *MT* of Jeremiah speaks many times of the writing down of Jeremiah's words (e.g., Jer. 25:13; 30:2; 36:2, 28, 32; 45:1; 51:60, 63), and the book itself suggests multiple versions of various lengths coming from the prophet's own hand (see the shorter Babylonian edition in Jeremiah 51:59–64 versus Baruch's longer Egyptian edition in Jeremiah 36:32; 45:1–5 with 43:5–7). This may help explain the book's distinctive textual tradition, and it could mean that all known versions came from the prophet himself.

35. On these texts, see especially William C. Pohl IV, "A Messianic Reading of Psalm 89: A Canonical and Intertextual Study," *JETS* 58, 3 (2015): 522–25; cf. Knut M. Heim, "The (God-)forsaken King of Psalm 89: A Historical and Intertextual Enquiry," in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day, *JSOTSup* 270 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 296–322. For a provocative alternative reading of Isaiah 55:3, see Peter J. Gentry, "Rethinking the 'Sure Mercies of David' in Isaiah 55:3," *WTJ* 62, 2 (2007): 279–304; Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 406–21. While less clear, two other texts from Isaiah and an additional one from Micah may be reading Psalm 72 as an eschatological text related to the end-times reign of God, which in context is recognized to come ultimately through his messianic figure (cf. Ps. 72:1–2 with Isa. 32:1; Ps. 72:9 with Mic. 7:17; Ps. 72:10 with Isa. 60:9, 11). For these and other potential links between the Psalms and the Latter Prophets, see Sue Gillingham, "From Liturgy to Prophecy: The Use of Psalmody in Second Temple Judaism," *CBQ* 64, 3 (2002): 471–76.

36. The dating of Psalm 89 is difficult, for (1) it is clearly written during a time when the Davidic kingdom promises appear to be in jeopardy (see Ps. 89:38–46[H39–47]), but (2) the attribution to "Ethan the Ezrahite" next to a similar attribution to "Heman the Ezrahite" in Psalm 88 seems to link Psalm 89 to the time of David and Solomon. Perhaps Ethan penned the text at an old age, soon after Solomon's death and just after the division of the empire in the days of Rehoboam (see esp. 1 Kings 4:31[H5:11]; cf. 1 Chron. 15:16–17, 19).

37. For this reading, see Pohl, "A Messianic Reading of Psalm 89," 507–25.

38. See Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?*, *NAC Studies in Bible and Theology* 9 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010), 39–41.

39. For a discussion of the Numbers texts as messianic, see *ibid.*, 38–39, 52–55.

echoing the imagery of Psalm 2:9, where God’s royal Son will overcome the raging nations “with a rod of iron” (cf. Gen. 49:10; Num. 24:17; Rev. 12:5; 19:15).

More explicit are Peter’s exegetical conclusions in Acts 2:30–31, where, in reflecting on the meaning of Psalm 16:8–11, the apostle asserts of David, “Being therefore a *prophet*, and *knowing* that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, *he foresaw and spoke* about the resurrection of the Christ.” I will say more about this verse below, but what should be clear by now is that the New Testament authors, the Old Testament prophets, and David himself believed that the Psalms pointed ahead, portraying the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories (1 Peter 1:10–12). Insofar as we identify ourselves with this anointed king, his prayers become our prayers and his music our music.

The Variety of Psalm Subgenres



Psalms was the first book that Old Testament scholars assessed through the lens of genre, and this approach still dominates much Old Testament interpretation.⁴⁰ Eight of the most well-recognized psalm subgenres are:

- Lament psalms (including penitential and imprecatory psalms)
- Trust or confidence psalms
- Thanksgiving psalms
- Praise psalms or hymns (including enthronement psalms)
- Royal psalms
- Wisdom/Torah psalms
- Liturgy psalms
- Historical psalms

These categories are relatively self-explanatory and distinguished by their content. Knowing which psalms fit each category allows us to easily find words to express the prayers of our hearts. Figure 1.11 supplies one categorization of the Psalms by subgenre.

40. Two well-known, very helpful books that approach the Psalter by focusing on genre categories are Bernhard W. Anderson and Steven Bishop, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000); and Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 212–15.

Lament	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 12, 13, 14 (= 53), 17, 22, 26, 27, 28, 35, 38, 39, 41, 42/43, 44, 51, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 63, 64, 69, 70, 71, 74, 77, 79, 80, 82, 83, 85, 86, 88, 90, 94, 102, 106, 108, 109, 120, 123, 126, 130, 137, 140, 141, 142, 143 (Penitential Psalms = 6, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143; Imprecatory Psalms = 35, 55, 59, 69, 79, 109, 137)
Trust	11, 16, 23, 91, 121, 125, 129, 131
Thanksgiving	30, 66, 92, 107, 116, 118, 124, 138
Praise/Hymn	8, 29, 33, 46, 47, 48, 76, 84, 87, 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 103, 104, 105, 111, 113, 114, 117, 122, 134, 135, 136, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150 (Songs of Zion = 46, 48, 76, 84, 87; Enthronement of YHWH Psalms = 47, 93, 96, 97, 98, 99)
Royal	2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 101, 110, 132, 144
Wisdom/Torah	1, 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128
Liturgy	15, 24 (cf. also 136)
Historical	78 (cf. also 105, 106, 107, 114)
Mixed	9/10, 19, 25, 31, 32, 34, 36, 40, 65, 89, 119
Unclear	50, 52, 62, 67, 68, 75, 81, 115, 133, 139
Prepared by John C. Crutchfield for <i>What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About: A Survey of Jesus' Bible</i> , ed. Jason S. DeRouchie (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013), 342. Used by permission.	

Fig. 1.11. The Psalms by Subgenre

When David moved the ark of the Lord to Jerusalem, his delight in music matched by his passion for God moved him to commission the Levites as music ministers. He appointed leaders over harps and lyres, cymbals and trumpets, and he even appointed a vocal ensemble. Overall, he called these worship leaders “to invoke [i.e., appeal for help], to thank, and to praise the LORD” (1 Chron. 16:4). As we will see below, invocation is the essence of the psalms of *lament*, gratitude of the psalms of *thanksgiving*, and adoration of the psalms of *praise*. Furthermore, while most of the psalm genres listed above distinguish themselves by subject matter alone, the psalms of lament, thanksgiving, and praise are also marked by structural patterns. In light of David’s directive, we may have biblical warrant for viewing all other psalm subgenres simply as types of these three main categories.

With this, the Chronicler asserted that the Levitical music leaders that David

appointed (i.e., Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun) were “seers” (1 Chron. 25:5; 2 Chron. 29:30; 35:15) who “prophesied under the direction of the king” “with lyres, with harps, and with cymbals . . . in thanksgiving and praise to the LORD” (1 Chron. 25:1–3). It was with their words and those of the “prophet” David (Acts 2:30; cf. 2 Sam. 23:2) that the faithful in Israel “sang praises with gladness” to the Lord (2 Chron. 29:30). Both the nature of the royal psalms and the fact that these leaders “prophesied under the direction of the king,” whose life was shaped by the Davidic covenant kingdom promises (2 Sam. 7:12–16; 1 Chron. 17:11–14; 25:2), strongly suggest that we should understand this prophetic role to include foretelling (i.e., prediction) as well as forth-telling. We will now see that the New Testament authors read the various psalms in just this way.

Psalms of Lament, Trust, Thanksgiving, and Praise



By far the two most common psalm subgenres are laments and praises, and fitted between them in logical progression are trust psalms and thanksgivings. *Psalms of lament* are cries for help to God out of the midst of pain. *Psalms of trust* declare confidence in the Lord, yet still out of the midst of pain. *Psalms of thanksgiving* express gratitude for deliverance or provision after the pain. *Psalms of praise* are hymns that celebrate who YHWH is and what he has done, especially in relation to creation and redemption. Most psalm subgenres are distinguished only by their general subject matter, but psalms of lament, thanksgiving, and praise are also marked by structural patterns.

1. Psalms of Lament (APTRAP)

- a. Address to God
- b. Petitions, usually for being heard
- c. Trouble described
- d. Reason for why God should answer
- e. Assurance declared (confidence or trust)
- f. Praise or promise of sacrifice

One of the features highlighted in the royal psalms was that the Messiah’s victory over evil and global reign would come only through great suffering (Pss. 18:37–50[H38–51]; 20:1–9[H2–10]; 144:7–8, 11). Similarly, Isaiah foretold that the royal servant’s path to being “high and lifted up” (Isa. 52:13) would be as “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (53:3). Out of this perspective, the writer of Hebrews states, “In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death” (Heb. 5:7). The Gospel writers detail Christ’s

journey through tribulation unto triumph, and they note that Christ’s prayers were often drawn directly from the psalms of lament.

As noted above, laments in ancient Israel often took on a specific form, often including six elements. For example, most of the pattern is evident in this lament from Psalm 6, in which the anointed king cries out as an innocent sufferer under the hand of God’s punishment.

1	O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger	<i>Address to God</i>
2–4	Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing; heal me, O LORD, for my bones are troubled. My soul also is greatly troubled. . . . Turn, O LORD, deliver my life; save me for the sake of your steadfast love.	<i>Petitions and reasons for why God should answer</i>
6–7	I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears. . . . [My eye] grows weak because of all my foes.	<i>Trouble described</i>
8–10	Depart from me, all you workers of evil, for the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping. The LORD has heard my plea; the LORD accepts my prayer. All my enemies shall be ashamed	<i>Assurance declared</i>
<p>NOTE: The missing element here is “praise or promise of sacrifice,” but this feature is evident at the end of the lament in Psalm 7:17[H18] or in the midst of the lament in Psalm 27:6.</p>		

Fig. 1.12. Psalm 6—A Psalm of Lament

Jesus prayed this psalm to God directly after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, as his gaze became increasingly fixed on the path to death that he was about to tread. Drawing on Psalm 6:3–4[H4–5], he exclaimed, “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour” (John 12:27). The anguish we hear reminds us of similar groanings he expressed in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:38–39, 44), associated with the lament in Psalm 42:5[H6]), and of his climactic cry from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46), which quotes from the lament in Psalm 22:1[H2]. Earlier in his ministry, Jesus drew from Psalm 6:8[H9] to describe what he will say to the wicked at the final judgment (Matt. 7:23). He also asserts that the world’s hating him without cause was fulfilling exactly what had been predicted in the lament of Psalm 35:19 (John 15:25). In the first temple cleansing, he explains the distress of his soul by declaring, “Zeal for your house will consume me” (John 2:17), quoting from the lament in Psalm 69:9[H10].

Significantly, as “a disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master” (Matt. 10:24), anyone who wants to follow Christ must “deny himself and take up his

cross and follow” him (16:24). “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). Thus, just as the king’s journey through suffering becomes the journey of all finding refuge in him (Ps. 2:12), so, too, his prayers can become ours. Right after stressing that Christ suffered for God’s sake and quoting the king’s lament in Psalm 69:9[H10], “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me,” Paul declares that “whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Rom. 15:3–4). While broadly speaking he means that all the Old Testament matters for Christians, most directly he means that the psalms of lament become the supplications of all who find refuge in Jesus. That is, the psalms that initially stood as the prayers of the Christ now become the songs of the saved. May we sing the laments in hope, confident that “those whom [God] foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Rom. 8:29; cf. Pss. 2:7; 22:22[H23]).

2. Psalms of Trust

Whereas laments focus on the problem, psalms of trust focus on the answer, but both are prayers grown out of a context of suffering. No special pattern is present in trust psalms, but all of them express confidence that God is both faithful and in charge.

The beloved Psalm 23 falls into this category. Placed after the lament of Psalm 22, which is loaded with predictions of Christ’s suffering and exaltation (see “The Nature of Text Criticism and Psalm 22:16[H17]” in chapter 3) and which includes a vow to praise YHWH before his brothers for the divine rescue (22:22–24[H23–25]), we can read Psalm 23 first as Christ’s testimony that YHWH is *his* Shepherd.⁴¹ Then those of us who find refuge in him (2:12) can sing the same song of hope ourselves.

1–3	The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.	<i>Certainty and rest in God’s provision</i>
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Fig. 1.13. Psalm 23—A Psalm of Trust

41. Douglas J. Green argues for the legitimacy of a messianic interpretation in “‘The LORD Is Christ’s Shepherd’: Psalm 23 as Messianic Prophecy,” in *Eyes to See, Ears to Hear: Essays in Memory of Alan Groves*, ed. Peter Enns, Douglas J. Green, and Michael B. Kelly (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), 33–46. Disappointingly, Green’s approach separates the messianic reading of this psalm from its original historical context, claiming that David did not originally intend a messianic interpretation but that it is still legitimate in light of the way in which New Testament authors read the Psalms. In contrast, I want to stress that the messianic reading was indeed part of David’s original historical intent, which also included the view that all finding refuge in the anointed king could in turn make his prayers their own; his words of trust become our words of trust. For an argument that Psalms 22–24 form a unit within the Psalter, see Nancy L. DeClaisse-Walford, “An Intertextual Reading of Psalms 22, 23, and 24,” in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, ed. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller, VTSup 99 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 139–52.

4–6	Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.	<i>Certainty and rest in God's protection</i>
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Fig. 1.13. Psalm 23—A Psalm of Trust (cont.)

The New Testament draws on psalms of trust many times. One example is found in the account of Christ's death. Just before his final breath, Jesus drew verbatim from the declaration of trust in Psalm 31:5[H6], changing only the Greek future tense to present in order to stress that he was at that very moment fulfilling the king's vow from the psalm: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

Similarly, Luke notes that both Peter and Paul interpreted the testimony of trust in Psalm 16:8–11 as a direct prediction of Jesus' resurrection (Acts 2:25–32; 13:35–37). In order to clarify why "it was not possible" for the pangs of death to hold Jesus (Acts 2:24), Peter drew on the Greek version of Psalm 16:8–11 (= Ps. 15 LXX), saying, "David says *concerning him*, 'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence'" (Acts 2:25–28). At this, Peter then declares: "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption" (2:29–31). Peter says that David was a "prophet" who both "knew" of God's promise for an eternal kingdom and "foresaw" the resurrection of Christ (2:30–31; cf. 3:18, 24; 10:43). From 2 Samuel 7:12 we learn that David knew he would die, and the apostles stress that he "both died and was buried" (Acts 2:29) and that his body "saw corruption" (13:36). Thus, we cannot see the words of the king in Psalm 16 as referring to anything in David's life that perhaps in turn foreshadowed Christ's resurrection.⁴² Rather, the apostles' exegesis of Psalm 16 led them to see it as a direct prediction.

42. A number of scholars hold this view, which we can tag as a *typological* reading of Psalm 16 (e.g., M. Rese, "Die Funktion der alttestamentlichen Zitate und Anspielungen in den Reden der Apostelgeschichte," in *Les Actes des Apôtres: Traditions, rédaction, théologie*, ed. J. Kremer et al., BETL 48 [Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1979], 76; Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, trans. Donald H. Madvig [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], 122–23; James M. Hamilton Jr., personal correspondence). Yet we must ask with I. Howard Marshall, "Is it appropriate to use the term 'typological' of a statement that was not true of

3. Psalms of Thanksgiving (IMART)

- a. Introduction of praise, addressed to God
- b. Misery or trouble reported
- c. Appeal for others to praise God
- d. Rescue announced
- e. Testimony of vow or praise

Gratitude to God should abound in the hearts of those he has saved, and we should often express our thanks in words. As figure 1.14 shows, the words of the king in Psalm 30 provide a good example of the pattern found in many thanksgiving psalms.

1	I will extol you, O LORD,	Introduction of praise, addressed to God
	for you have drawn me up and have not let my foes rejoice over me.	Misery or trouble reported
4	Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name.	Appeal for others to praise God
11–12	You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent.	Rescue announced
	O LORD, I will give thanks to you forever!	Testimony of vow or praise

Fig. 1.14. Psalm 30—A Psalm of Thanksgiving

The New Testament includes multiple links to psalms of thanksgiving. One of the favorites is Psalm 34. In 34:8[H9] the king appeals for his listeners to “taste and see that the LORD is good,” and Peter says that if his readers have heeded this command, they should mature in godliness (1 Peter 2:2–3). Later, in order to motivate his audience to pursue obtaining blessing from God and to call them not to repay evil for evil, Peter draws on Psalm 34:12–16[H13–17]: “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on

the ‘type’ himself?” (I. Howard Marshall, “Acts,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007], 538). As we will develop in chapter 10, *typology* refers to correspondences that God intended between earlier and later persons, events, or institutions, by which the earlier types are, at least in hindsight, recognized to predict the later antitypes. See especially Richard Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical TUPOS Structures*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 2 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1981).

the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (1 Peter 3:9–12). Finally, in Psalm 34:20[H21] the king declares God to be his deliverer who has kept all his bones so that not one was broken—a prophecy that John declares is fulfilled in the way Jesus was crucified (John 19:36).

Another thanksgiving psalm that the New Testament authors frequently quote is Psalm 118, which shows up in many different contexts. For example, in order to clarify why Christians should be content, and as an inference from God’s promise in Joshua 1:5 that the Lord will never leave or forsake us, the author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 118:6, declaring, “So we can confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?’” (Heb. 13:6). What was true for the psalmist continues to be true for all finding refuge in God. Drawing on Psalm 118:22–23, Jesus identified himself as “the stone that the builders rejected” who in turn would “become the cornerstone,” and he said that all who spurned him would be crushed (Matt. 21:42–44). Peter stressed the same idea from Psalm 118 and added that the church is built on Christ, the cornerstone (1 Peter 2:4–8). In Psalm 118:25–26 the psalmist pleads for God to “save” and then declares blessed the one through whom YHWH will bring deliverance. These are the verses that the crowd drew from at Christ’s triumphal entry, singing, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” (Matt. 21:9). Jesus also quoted them when he declared before his death that Jerusalem would not see him again until the city declared, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” (23:39).

4. Psalms of Praise (SRS)

- a. Summons to praise
- b. Reason for praise
- c. Summons to praise repeated

The shortest of all psalms, Psalm 117, provides a helpful overview of the basic parts of a hymn of praise.

1	Praise the LORD, all nations! Extol him, all peoples!	Summons to praise
2	For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever.	Reason for praise
	Praise the LORD!	Summons to praise repeated

Fig. 1.15. Psalm 117—A Psalm of Praise

The Lord is worthy of highest praise “from the heavens” (Ps. 148:1) unto “the earth” (148:7)—from the angels to the luminaries (148:2–3), from the mountaintops to the cedar

trees (148:9), from “everything that has breath” (150:6). His anointed king (103:1–2), his people (118:2), and indeed all the nations of the earth (117:1; 148:11–12) must “praise him for his mighty deeds” and “according to his excellent greatness” (150:2).

The Psalter witnesses a progressive movement from shadow to sunlight, from tribulation to triumph, and from lament to praise (fig. 1.16). Psalms 144 and 145 end the book’s main body by celebrating YHWH as the steadfast love and fortress of his king (144:1–2, 9–11) and as the one who graciously and mercifully reigns over all (145:1, 8–9). Each of the initial four books ends with a doxology, calling people to look Godward (41:13[H14]; 72:18–19; 89:52[H53]; 106:48). And then the fifth book concludes the whole Psalter with five psalms that begin and end with the declaration, “Praise the LORD!” (146:1, 10; 147:1, 20; 148:1, 14; 149:1, 9; 150:1, 6).

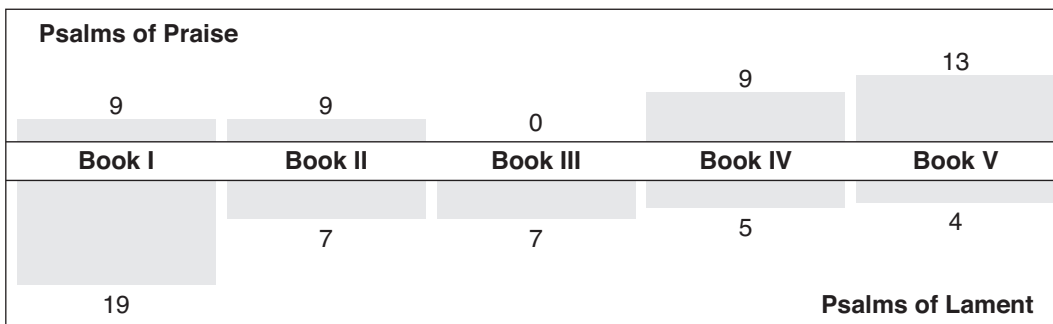


Fig. 1.16. From Lament to Praise in the Psalter⁴³

Building on the praises in Psalm 8, we recognize that the Christ to whom children cried for deliverance at the triumphal entry (Matt. 21:16; cf. Ps. 8:2[H3]), the Son of Man who became human, is the one under whom God has subjected all things (Eph. 1:22; cf. Ps. 8:4–6[H5–7]). Still, we wait for this subjection to become fully visible (1 Cor. 15:27; Heb. 2:6–8). With the early church (Acts 4:24), we put our hope in the one “who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them” (Ps. 146:6). Today we sing and kneel to the Lord (95:1, 6), nurturing believing hearts that treasure God’s promises in order that we might enter the rest that will never end (95:7–11; Heb. 3:7–11; 4:3, 5–10). We trust not simply the giver of bread but the very one who is the Bread of Life (Ps. 105:40; John 6:31–33).

The ultimate goal of the Psalms was to generate praise to YHWH for his saving and satisfying reign through his anointed king. The Psalms supplied messianic music to the saints of old—music designed to nurture hope for the coming kingdom. As the church of Jesus Christ, living in the days of fulfillment (Luke 24:44), may we “let the word of Christ” dwell in our hearts as we sing “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness . . . to God” (Col. 3:16; cf. Eph. 5:19). In doing so, we will engage in the task for which we were designed—to glorify the one from whom, through whom, and to whom are all things (Rom. 11:36). “Praise the LORD!”

43. Prepared by Jason S. DeRouchie and John C. Crutchfield. Taken from Jason S. DeRouchie, ed., *What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About*, 348. Used with permission.

Guidelines for Interpreting the Psalms



The move from exegesis to theology is ultimately to result in doxology, and the book of Psalms provides us a perfect springboard to praising God. What are some principles to help guide proper interpretation of the Psalms?

1. Recall the problems and promises of salvation history and the placement of the Psalms within the flow of Jesus' Bible.

The book of Psalms marks a significant shift in the flow of Jesus' Bible. Unlike the Prophets, which focus on Israel's sin and the covenant curses and give only minor (though always evident) attention to the promise of restoration blessing, each book of the Writings is dominated by a message of kingdom hope in an all-wise, all-sovereign God, who is faithful to his own, even in the midst of pain. Jeremiah-Malachi recalled the new covenant promises and clearly anticipated the new creational kingdom for which Israel longed. The final three Prophets of the Twelve were also part of the initial restoration (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi). Nevertheless, none of the Prophets claimed that the new creational kingdom had yet arrived in history. Instead, even after the initial return to the land, the Jews continued in rebellion (Hag. 1:9; Zech. 1:2–6; Mal. 1:6) and did not experience either the inner transformation or the messianic king or kingdom that God had promised (see Ezek. 36:22–36; 37:21–28). Into this darkness, the prelude of Ruth affirms the kingdom of YHWH's redeeming grace through the line of David, and then Psalms proclaims hope for all who celebrate God's reign and find refuge in his Anointed Son. Psalms pushes the reader's hope forward, calling him to follow the anointed king on his journey from dirge to doxology and through tribulation unto triumph. The Lord's promises to David remained, and the eternal king and kingdom would come.

2. Remember the Psalter's overall structure, message, and flow.

The Psalter is made up of five books that move from lament to praise and nurture hope in the future fulfillment of God's kingdom promises, ultimately through his Christ.⁴⁴ *Book I* (Pss. 1–41) and *Book II* (Pss. 42–72) form a unit that begins (Ps. 2) and ends (Ps. 72) with a glorious vision of the coming king.⁴⁵ The two books together introduce in recurring cycles this king's journey through tribulation unto triumph. *Book III* (Pss. 73–89) then laments the disgraceful, broken state of the Davidic dynasty,

44. John C. Crutchfield, "The Redactional Agenda of the Book of Psalms," *HUCA* 74 (2003): 21–47.

45. So too David C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms*, JSOT-Sup 252 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 243–53.

but Psalm 89 supplies hope “that YHWH’s covenant loyalty will reverse this deplorable condition.”⁴⁶

Book IV (Pss. 90–106) opens by stressing YHWH’s sovereign reign and by recalling his past forgiveness in order to heighten hope that he can do it again. In contrast to some contemporary perspectives,⁴⁷ the focus on YHWH’s kingship in *Book IV* does not stand as a rejection of the human, Davidic line, but rather aligns with the original vision of Psalm 2, in which YHWH and his anointed king reign together, the latter standing as the former’s earthly representative.⁴⁸

Book V (Pss. 107–150) then builds on this vision of sovereignty and includes a heightened number of Davidic psalms (Pss. 138–145) in order to give hope that God’s kingdom promises will indeed come to pass through his Messiah.⁴⁹ With imagery akin to 1 Samuel 2:10, 35 and Zechariah 6:13, Psalm 110 finds YHWH vowing to David’s “Lord” that he is “a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (110:1, 4). If God here promises to keep his less-prominent oath regarding the priesthood of Melchizedek, we must believe that he will also keep his well-known oath regarding the Davidic throne—an oath that Psalm 89 highlights three times (89:3–4, 35–36, 49[H4–5, 36–37, 50]). This fact is then reaffirmed in Psalm 132:11–18 and celebrated in the reaffirmation of both Davidic kingship and YHWH’s kingship in Psalms 144–145.⁵⁰ While those finalizing the Psalter recognized the failure of the Davidic house to meet the complete vision of kingship that YHWH had promised, they did not lose hope in God’s commitment to raise up a deliverer who would establish God’s worldwide kingdom on earth.

From beginning to end, the Psalter focuses heavily on the hostility of mankind against YHWH and his anointed and on YHWH’s final triumph through his righteous king for all finding refuge in him. The general perspective of the righteous and the wicked is laid out in *Book I*, where there is only one true “righteous one,” the anointed of God (e.g., Pss. 5:12[H13]; 7:9[H10]; 14:5; 34:19, 21[H20, 22]; 37:12, 16, 25, 32). He is the “blessed man” (1:1), against whom stand various enemies both near and far

46. Michael K. Snearly, “The Return of the King: Book V as a Witness to Messianic Hope in the Psalter,” in *The Psalms: Language for All Seasons of the Soul*, ed. Andrew J. Schmutzer and David M. Howard (Chicago: Moody Press, 2014), 210.

47. See especially Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, SBLDS 76 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 209–28, esp. 212–14; Wilson, “The Use of Royal Psalms at the ‘Seams’ of the Hebrew Psalter,” *JSOT* 11, 35 (1986): 85–94; Wilson, “The Shape of the Book of Psalms,” *Int* 46, 1 (1992): 129–42; Wilson, “Shaping the Psalter: A Consideration of Editorial Linkage in the Book of Psalms,” in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, ed. J. Clinton McCann, *JSOTSup* 159 (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1997), 72–82; Wilson, “King, Messiah, and the Reign of God: Revisiting the Royal Psalms and the Shape of the Psalter,” in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, ed. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller, *VTSup* 99 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 391–406.

48. David M. Howard Jr., *The Structure of Psalms 93–100*, *UCSD Biblical and Judaic Studies* 5 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 200–207; Howard, “Divine and Human Kingship as Organizing Motifs in the Psalter,” in *The Psalms: Language for All Seasons of the Soul*, ed. Andrew J. Schmutzer and David M. Howard (Chicago: Moody Press, 2014), 205–6; Snearly, “The Return of the King,” 210.

49. See especially Snearly, “The Return of the King,” 207–15; cf. John C. Crutchfield, *Psalms in Their Context: An Interpretation of Psalms 107–118*, *Paternoster Biblical Monographs* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015).

50. So Howard, “Divine and Human Kingship as Organizing Motifs in the Psalter,” 206.

(e.g., 2:1–2; 3:1; 5:8[H9]; 6:8[H9]; 7:1, 6, 9[H2, 7, 10]). Others are tagged as “blessed” and “righteous” (e.g., 1:5–6; 32:11; 33:1; 34:15[H16]; 37:17, 29, 39), but they are only so because they find refuge in the righteous *one* (2:12).⁵¹ Apart from this anointed king, “there is none who does good, not even one” (14:3; 53:3[H4]; cf. Rom. 3:12). In the end, “affliction will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous [one] will be condemned” (Ps. 34:21[H22]). YHWH’s royal Son (2:7) will “break them with a rod of iron” (2:9). Therefore, the evildoers “are in great terror,” knowing that “God is with the generation of the righteous [one],” who himself finds refuge in the Lord (14:5–6). A proper reading of the Psalms requires that we keep in mind the progressive movement through tribulation unto triumph and that we seek to find deeper refuge in the king, whom we now know today as Jesus.

3. Keep the Christ central.

The words of the Psalter are either about Christ or by Christ.⁵² In it we hear the prayers of the Christ and the songs of the saved. I say “Christ” for two reasons: (a) The Greek term Χριστός (“Christ”) is the translation of the Hebrew term מָשִׁיחַ (“Messiah/Anointed One”) in texts such as Psalm 2:2. This monarch is the principal human figure in the Psalms—both in suffering and in triumph.⁵³ (b) The Psalms portray this hoped-for royal figure as the ideal king and human who embodies the hopes of the world (see “Reading the Psalms as Messianic Music” above). Accordingly, salvation history identifies this Savior-deliverer as Jesus of Nazareth, and the New Testament tags him as “the Christ” in light of the way in which books such as the Psalms spoke of him (e.g., Acts 4:26 [ESV footnote]; cf. Matt. 1:1; 16:16). The various laments, thanksgivings, and praises in the Psalter are either about the anointed king or by the anointed king, and they also become the music of all finding refuge in him (Ps. 2:12).

The Old Testament explicitly tags many of its psalm writers as “seers” (1 Chron. 25:5; 2 Chron. 29:30; 35:15) who “prophesied” and whose words became the praises of Israel (1 Chron. 25:1–3). Accordingly, Jesus, the New Testament authors, and the Old Testament prophets all read the Psalms as predictions of the Messiah (see “Reading the Psalms as Messianic Music” and “The Variety of Psalm Subgenres” above). Also, David, the author of about half the psalms, was himself a “prophet” (Acts 2:30; cf. 2 Sam. 23:2) and was mindful both of his desperate state and that his hopes were in the one he called his “Lord” (Ps. 110:1; cf. Matt. 22:41–46).⁵⁴ Building on God’s kingdom promise

51. To see the distinction between the “righteous [one]” and “righteous [ones],” track the shifts between the singular and plural forms of צַדִּיק (“righteous”) in Psalms 34 and 37.

52. Futato, *Interpreting the Psalms*, 174.

53. For more on this idea, see Waltke, “A Canonical Process Approach to the Psalms,” 11–12; Patrick D. Miller, “The Beginning of the Psalter,” in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, ed. J. Clinton McCann Jr., Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 83–92.

54. In Psalm 14:7, David pleads for God to let salvation come out of Zion, the abode of the anointed king (cf. 2:6), and he does so by alluding to Moses’ promise of second exodus from exile associated with the latter days’ new covenant: “When the LORD restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice” (cf. Deut. 30:3). We see a similar perspective in David’s song of thanks from 1 Chronicles 16:35: “Save us, O God of our salvation, and gather and

to David in 2 Samuel 7:12–14, Peter stressed how David himself consciously predicted Christ’s victory over death: “Being . . . a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ” (Acts 2:30–31; cf. 2 Sam. 23:1–7). In these words we see in action what Peter elsewhere identified—that the Old Testament prophets “searched and inquired carefully” regarding “what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories” (1 Peter 1:10–11). Where would they search but in their Scriptures? Peter also stressed that *all* the prophets from Moses forward—which would include David—spoke of the sufferings of the Christ and the mission that they would generate (Acts 3:18–24; 10:43; cf. Luke 24:44–47; Acts 26:22–23). Keep Christ in mind as you interpret the Psalms.

4. Read the Psalms as poetry.

Even a casual reader of Scripture can identify that the Psalter reads differently from historical narrative, such as Judges. The distinction is that psalms are poetry, and our English Bibles usually identify the difference by using poetic lines, which results in more white space on the page (compare the shape of Judges 4 and 5 in the ESV).

Traditionally, scholars have distinguished prose from poetry by identifying poetic “indicators.” Wilfred Watson supplies nineteen such features, differentiating “broad indicators” and “structural indicators”:⁵⁵

- a. *Broad indicators*: presence of established line forms,⁵⁶ ellipsis (gapping), unusual vocabulary, conciseness (terseness), unusual word order,⁵⁷ archaisms, use of meter, regularity and symmetry.
- b. *Structural indicators*: parallelism, word pairs, chiasmic patterns, envelope figure (inclusio), breakup of stereotyped phrases, repetition, gender-matched parallelism, tricolon, rhyme and other sound patterns, absence or rarity of prose elements.⁵⁸

deliver us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name, and glory in your praise” (= Ps. 106:47–48). While David brought the nation of Israel to the height of its glory, he himself viewed the nation as already being under curse in desperate need of the future salvation that Moses promised.

55. Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Technique*, JSOTSup 26 (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1984), 46–54.

56. Michael Patrick O’Connor argues that the principle to identify Hebrew poetry is in neither meter nor parallelism but by seeing whether a text follows the constraints of a poetic line, having from 0 to 3 predicators (e.g., a finite verb), from 1 to 4 constituents (i.e., a grammatical phrase such as a verb, a noun, a prepositional phrase, a construct chain), and from 2 to 5 units (i.e., a word, though not including small particles such as ׀ [“since, because, that, when”] or ׀ [“if”] or prepositions such as ׀ [“to”]) (*Hebrew Verse Structure*, 2nd ed. [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997]). For a brief summary and critique of his work, see Duane A. Garrett and Jason S. DeRouchie, *A Modern Grammar for Biblical Hebrew* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 340–42.

57. Poetic texts employ verb-initial clauses at a rate equal to non-verb-initial clauses, in which the linear as opposed to segmented nature of prose gives rise to its being dominated by verb-initial, default clauses. Furthermore, poetry regularly precedes a verb by two or more constituents, whereas prose rarely does. For more on this, see Jason S. DeRouchie, “Deuteronomy as Didactic Poetry? A Critique of D. L. Christensen’s View,” *JAAS* 10, 1 (2007): 1–13.

58. Comparatively infrequent in poetry, the definite article (׀), the definite direct object marker (׀), and the relative particle ׀ occur in high concentrations in prose. See Francis I. Andersen and A. Dean Forbes,

Recognizably, all these elements show up with less frequency in prose,⁵⁹ so most scholars today treat the distinction between prose and poetry as “more one of degree than kind.”⁶⁰ Framing the relationship this way allows for various literary and linguistic features to occur in prose while emphasizing that a predominance of them signals poetry.

Naturally, reading literature that is on a higher register of style requires careful reading to identify the various levels of artistry that the author used to convey his message and to effect response. The songwriters sought to move their audiences to worship, to draw their readers into the prayers and praises in personal ways. They use concrete words, vivid images, wordplay, and rhythm in order to help us feel lament, truth, thanksgiving, and praise. Read the Psalms as poetry.

5. Account for the psalm titles.

Of the 150 psalms, all but 34 of them have some form of title (i.e., superscription) that includes notes about their performance, type, author, purpose, or historical origin.⁶¹ The only title with all these parts is Psalm 60, which opens: “To the choirmaster: according to Shushan Eduth. A miktam of David; for instruction; when he strove with Aram-Naharaim and with Aram-Zobah, and when Joab on his return struck down twelve thousand of Edom in the Valley of Salt.” We can distinguish the various parts of the title as follows:

- a. *Expanded performance instructions* (P): “To the choirmaster: according to Shushan Eduth”
- b. *Type of psalm* (T): “A miktam”
- c. *Author* (A): “Of David”
- d. *Purpose* (Pu): “For instruction”
- e. *Historical origin* (H): “When he strove with Aram-Naharaim and with Aram-Zobah, and when Joab on his return struck down twelve thousand of Edom in the Valley of Salt”

Figure 1.17 (on page 81) provides an overview of the patterns and attributed authorship of titles throughout the Psalms, with shifts between white and gray signaling movement

“‘Prose Particle’ Counts of the Hebrew Bible,” in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Festschrift for David Noel Freedman*, ed. Carol L. Meyers and Michael Patrick O’Connor, ASOR Special Volume Series 1 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 165–83.

59. So James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981; repr., Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 59–95, esp. 85–87, 94–95.

60. Sue E. Gillingham, *The Poems and Psalms of the Hebrew Bible*, Oxford Bible Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 36. For a helpful overview of the scholarly discussion on distinguishing prose and poetry, see J. Kenneth Kuntz, “Biblical Hebrew Poetry in Recent Research, Part I,” *CurBS* 6 (1998): 55–57; Kuntz, “Biblical Hebrew Poetry in Recent Research, Part II,” *CurBS* 7 (1999): 44–47.

61. Following comparative data from the ancient Near East, the pattern in Habakkuk 3, and internal clues within the book of Psalms itself, Bruce Waltke argues that we should actually divide the present psalm superscripts into superscripts and subscripts, with the fifty-five musical notations including “to the musical director/choirmaster” going with the psalms that precede. He believes the superscripts relate to a psalm’s composition and the subscripts to its performance. See Bruce K. Waltke, “Superscripts, Postscripts, or Both,” *JBL* 110, 4 (1991): 583–96.

	SG	Title	Author		SG	Title	Author		SG	Title	Author
1	W		Anonymous	51	L	PTAH	David	101	R	TA	David
2	R		Anonymous	52	U	PTAH	David	102	L	TPu	Anonymous
3	L	TAH	David	53	L	PTA	David	103	P	A	David
4	L	PTA	David	54	L	PTAH	David	104	P		Anonymous
5	L	PTA	David	55	L	PTA	David	105	P		Anonymous
6	L	PTA	David	56	L	PTAH	David	106	L		Anonymous
7	L	TAH	David	57	L	PTAH	David	107	Th		Anonymous
8	P	PA	David	58	L	PTA	David	108	L	TTA	David
9	M	PTA	David	59	L	PTAH	David	109	L	PTA	David
10	M		Anonymous	60	L	PTAPuH	David	110	R	TA	David
11	T	PA	David	61	L	PA	David	111	P		Anonymous
12	L	PTA	David	62	U	PTA	David	112	W		Anonymous
13	L	PTA	David	63	L	TAH	David	113	P		Anonymous
14	L	PA	David	64	L	PTA	David	114	P		Anonymous
15	Lit	TA	David	65	M	PTAT	David	115	U		Anonymous
16	T	TA	David	66	Th	PTT	Anonymous	116	Th		Anonymous
17	L	TA	David	67	U	PTT	Anonymous	117	P		Anonymous
18	R	PTAH	David	68	U	PTAT	David	118	Th		Anonymous
19	M	PTA	David	69	L	PA	David	119	M		Anonymous
20	R	PTA	David	70	L	PAPu	David	120	L	TPu	Anonymous
21	R	PTA	David	71	L		Anonymous	121	T	TPu	Anonymous
22	L	PTA	David	72	R	A	Solomon	122	P	TPuA	David
23	T	TA	David	73	W	TA	Asaph	123	L	TPu	Anonymous
24	Lit	TA	David	74	L	TA	Asaph	124	Th	TPuA	David
25	M	A	David	75	U	PTAT	Asaph	125	T	TPu	Anonymous
26	L	A	David	76	P	PTAT	Asaph	126	L	TPu	Anonymous
27	L	A	David	77	L	PTA	Asaph	127	W	TPuA	Solomon
28	L	A	David	78	H	TA	Asaph	128	W	TPu	Anonymous
29	P	TA	David	79	L	TA	Asaph	129	T	TPu	Anonymous
30	Th	TATH	David	80	L	PTAT	Asaph	130	L	TPu	Anonymous
31	M	PTA	David	81	U	PA	Asaph	131	T	TPuA	David
32	M	TA	David	82	L	TA	Asaph	132	R	TPu	Anonymous
33	P		Anonymous	83	L	TTA	Asaph	133	U	TPuA	David
34	M	AH	David	84	P	PTA	Sons of Korah	134	P	TPu	Anonymous
35	L	A	David	85	L	PTA	Sons of Korah	135	P		Anonymous
36	M	PA	David	86	L	TA	David	136	P		Anonymous
37	W	A	David	87	P	TAT	Sons of Korah	137	L		Anonymous
38	L	TAPu	David	88	L	TTAPTA	Sons of Korah*	138	Th	A	David
39	L	PTA	David	89	M	TA	Ethan the Ezrahite	139	U	PTA	David
40	M	PTA	David	90	L	TA	Moses	140	L	PTA	David
41	L	PTA	David	91	T		Anonymous	141	L	TA	David
42	L	PTA	Sons of Korah	92	Th	TTPu	Anonymous	142	L	TAHT	David
43	L		Anonymous	93	P		Anonymous	143	L	TA	David
44	L	PTA	Sons of Korah	94	L		Anonymous	144	R	A	David
45	R	PTAT	Sons of Korah	95	P		Anonymous	145	P	TPuA	David
46	P	PAPT	Sons of Korah	96	P		Anonymous	146	P		Anonymous
47	P	PTA	Sons of Korah	97	P		Anonymous	147	P		Anonymous
48	P	TTA	Sons of Korah	98	P	T	Anonymous	148	P		Anonymous
49	W	PTA	Sons of Korah	99	P		Anonymous	149	P		Anonymous
50	U	TA	Asaph	100	P	TPu	Anonymous	150	P		Anonymous

*Psalm 88 is also attributed to Heman the Ezrahite.

KEY for Subgenre (SG): "L" Lament; "T" Trust; "Th" Thanksgiving; "P" Praise; "R" Royal; "W" Wisdom; "Lit" Liturgy; "H" Historical; "M" Mixed; "U" Unclear.

Key for Title: "P" Performance: "To the choirmaster"; "T" Type: "A Psalm"; "A" Author: "of X [Proper Name]"; "Pu" Purpose; "H" Historical Context; **Bold:** Something distinct or expanded.

Fig. 1.17. Patterns and Authorship in Psalm Titles

from one book to the next. Also included is a list of subgenres (SG) associated with each psalm. In the title pattern, elements marked in **bold** signal that there is something distinct or expanded from the most basic pattern of “To the choirmaster. A psalm of X [proper name].”

Nearly all scholars affirm the antiquity of the psalm titles. We know that the musical terms in the titles were ancient enough to have already fallen out of disuse by the third century B.C., for those who translated the Old Testament into Greek (i.e., the Septuagint) were already struggling to understand their meaning (a problem that we still have today). With this, we should not be surprised by David’s explicit connection with nearly half the psalms, for the Old Testament regularly points to him as Israel’s foremost music leader (e.g., 1 Sam. 16:14–23; 2 Sam. 22; Ps. 18; 2 Sam. 23:1–7; 1 Chron. 6:31; 15:16; 16:7; 25:1; 2 Chron. 29:30; Ezra 3:10; Neh. 12:24–47), and we know that the nation was singing music associated with him at a very early time (2 Chron. 29:30; Ps. 72:20; cf. 1 Chron. 16:7–37). Those in the New Testament period were clearly aware of the psalm titles, and both Jesus and Peter built arguments that hinged on Davidic authorship of certain psalms (Matt. 22:41–46 with Ps. 110:1; Acts 2:25–29 with Ps. 16:8–11).⁶² In light of the above, we have good reason to trust the authenticity of the titles as part of Scripture, believing that they are accurate in their claims to both authorship and history.⁶³

According to the titles, David authored each of the fourteen psalms that include a historical note. Of these, most show signs of lament (except Pss. 18, 30, 34), and all but Psalm 30 are either expressions of thanks or praise after deliverance (Pss. 18, 34) or cries of distress while running from enemies, experiencing betrayal, engaging in battle, or confessing sin (Pss. 3, 7, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, 142). God thus led David on his own journey of suffering in order to create a typological context from which to predict the ultimate sufferings of the Christ and the subsequent glories (1 Peter 1:11). The titles ground David’s messianic predictions in history and help us to see David’s life as pointing to the Christ’s.

The psalm titles place the seventy-three Davidic psalms mostly in Books I, II, and V.⁶⁴ The higher frequency of Davidic psalms at the beginning and end allows the whole Psalter to bear a Davidic-messianic stamp. While the sins of the Davidic line called the kingdom hope into question, the editor(s) of the Psalter stressed from beginning to end that God would deliver Israel’s king and those associated with him and that he would preserve both the king and his kingdom forever.

6. Use the Psalms’ subgenres to enhance personal and corporate worship.

In the two previous sections, I gave overviews of a number of subgenres in the Psalms (e.g., psalms of lament, thanksgiving, praise). This kind of analysis has a number of benefits.

62. In two instances the New Testament authors tag as Davidic psalms those that are not signaled as such in the Hebrew text (Acts 4:25–26 with Ps. 2:1–2; Heb. 4:7 with Ps. 95:7–8), though the LXX marks both as psalms of David.

63. For an overview of the question with an argument for the superscriptions’ authenticity and accuracy, see D. A. Brueggemann, “Psalms 4: Titles,” *DOT:WPW* 614–15; Gordon J. Wenham, *The Psalter Reclaimed: Praying and Praising with the Psalms* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 86–90.

64. The Septuagint (LXX) expands the list of Davidic psalms by fourteen; see Brueggemann, “Psalms 4: Titles,” 614.

a. Knowing the patterns of the subgenres helps our interpretive expectations.

Knowing the general patterns of the various categories of psalms can help us have proper expectations in our interpretation. It can also signal important departures from the norm, which can mark something significant.

b. Considering the subgenres helps us recognize Christ's humanness and helps motivate our perseverance in holiness.

The Psalms portray the anointed king as expressing every emotion that we ourselves feel and as finding vindication from God: anger and rage, fear and sorrow, faith amid danger, peace, gratitude, praise. The New Testament discloses that the Christ was “made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God” (Heb. 2:17). He was “in every respect . . . tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15; cf. Phil. 2:6–8). In the Psalms we get a unique taste of the inner passions and prayers of the anointed king. We hear the anguish of his laments, the joys of his thanksgivings, and the pleasures of his praise. And through these various expressions, we find help for our own journey through tribulation unto triumph. The different types of psalms help us in various ways to look “to Jesus” and to “consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted” (Heb. 12:2–3).

c. The different categories of psalms give words to our prayers for every season of life.

Sometimes we don't know how to pray. Knowing which psalms are laments, thanksgivings, or praises can help us in seasons of pain and pleasure to find words to express our hearts to God, whether individually or corporately. May the church increasingly become a people who sings the psalms as a means of identifying with Christ in his sufferings and victory.

While the benefits of subgenre analysis are real, I offer two important cautions. First, subgenre analysis tends to isolate the psalms from one another, losing any sense of canonical continuity within the Psalter as a whole. As noted above, the book of Psalms evidences intentionality in its structure and flow, and we can miss the beauty of this forest if we look only at the trees in isolation. Second, some psalms do not fit into single subgenre categories but appear to be more fluid mixtures of different subgenres. Heartfelt words to God so often combine praise and petition, thanksgiving and plea that we must be careful not to force a given psalm into a preconceived mold.