

Bible Study Chart

THE STRUCTURE OF THE FIVE BOOKS OF PSALMS

Assembled by Craig White Version 3.2, 1991, 2019

Foreword

To many people the Book of Psalms is a collection of hymns or lyric poems providing instruction and inspiration to the reader.

Some are Psalms of penitence (eg 6; 32; 38; 51; 143); some ethical (eg 1, 8); others are of praise (eg 19); ceremonial (eg 30, 90); messianic (16, 22, 45, 69, 110); prayer to defeat one's enemies (35, 37, 69; 109); and historical (eg 105).

However, the Book of Psalms, like so much of the Bible, contains duality and is multi-layered. In this regard I possessed a copy of Bullinger's *Companion Bible* since a young man and soon there after came into possession of Ernest Martin's thesis *An Outline of the Design and Development of the Holy Scripture* (1965, 1971, Ambassador College, Pasadena, California) which was later upgraded to a full book *Restoring the Original Bible* (ASK, Portland, Oregon). These works are eye-openers to the real structure of Psalms upon which the chart below is based. If properly understood, the Psalms throw further light upon God's Plan - they overlay or expand upon our understanding of His Plan.

How to use this chart as a study guide

Understand that Psalms is divided into five books. Each of these books are based on one of the books of the Pentateuch as well as the Holy Days and the Festival Scrolls. In addition, these five books picture the Church and people of God throughout the ages.

With that in mind, Psalms will take on a much deeper meaning for you, provide you with further understanding of the Plan of God and open your mind to a greater appreciation of His Word! No more will Psalms appear to be hymns only and a choice of inspirational chapters. Instead, in accordance with God's great and interesting mind, it will now be demonstrated to be a most fascinating book.

An article on the subject that is worth a read is "Psalms and Salvation: The Message Most Overlook!" By Earl Williams, *Good News*, April 1984. As is Appendix B. *The Structure of the Book of Psalms in Holy Bible in its Original Order* by Fred Coulter.

Book	Pentateuch Parallel	Holy Day Jewish Celebration Parallel	The Megilloth Parallels (Festival Scroll)	Types
Book 1 (chapters 1-41)	Genesis –concerning man	Passover	Song of Solomon	Trials and experiences – a type of a Christian. Redemption of man and David in the role of Christ. Type of the people of God during the first 6,000 years
Book 2 (chapters 42-72)	Exodus – concerning Israel	Pentecost	Ruth	The Church promised safety just before the return of the Messiah. Emphasis shifts from personal life of David to Israel as a whole. A type of some of the Church in a place of refuge
Book 3 (chapters 73-89)	Leviticus – concerning the sanctuary	Day of Ab and Trumpets	Lamentations	Persecution of the Church and punishment of Israel. Destruction across the globe. Israel and some in the Church go into captivity
Book 4 (chapters 90-106)	Numbers – concerning Israel and the nations	Feast of Tabernacles	Ecclesiastes	The very beginning of the millennium. The millennial conditions that will arise. Even then, man is transitory
Book 5 (chapters 107-150)	Deuteronomy – concerning God and His Word	Purim	Esther	Further into the millennium and the Kingdom of God on earth. Christians reigning and ruling with Christ

"CANONIZATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT"

by Ernest Martin

APPENDIX ONE

Preliminary Suggestions for the Structure of the Psalms

There are 150 individual psalms comprising the biblical Book of Psalms. There are psalms (or songs) found in other parts of the Bible. Examples: the psalm of Moses (Exo. 15:1-19; Rev. 15:3); the psalm of Deborah and Barak (Jud. 5:1-31); the psalm of Habakkuk - which is pure prophecy (3:1-19). Even in the New Testament there are psalms (Luke 1:46-55; 67-79).

Almost all of the psalms positioned outside the regular Book of Psalms have as their theme the matter of prophecy - usually prophetic teachings regarding the nation of Israel or, sometimes, information about the prophesied Messiah. This prophetic relevance is also found among the psalms located within the Book of Psalms itself. This has not been fully recognized by many people, nevertheless it is true. This can be shown in several ways, but prime teaching on the matter is found in the Book of Chronicles. That book relates that the psalms were sanctioned to be sung within the temple precincts by regularly assigned Levitical singers. These Levites were ordained to "prophesy with harps, with psalteries, and with cymbals" (I Chron. 25:1). These special men were consecrated to their tasks by King David and the prophet Samuel (I Chron. 9:22). There were 24 such designated groups to sing specified psalms in a regular order of administration (I Chron. 25:8-31). There were exactly 288 Levites (12 x 24) who "were instructed in the songs [psalms] of the Lord" (I Chron. 25:7). These 24 divisions were called "wards" and each was accompanied by 12 Levites. This shows that the number 24 (and 12) was important to the arrangement of the singers and the psalms which they sang.

It will be recalled that there were also 24 elders associated with the ceremonies of the heavenly temple as recorded in the Book of Revelation (Rev. 5:8,14; 11:16; 19:4). The Book of Revelation is devoted entirely to prophecy, and the symbolic numbers of 24 and 12 are found in several places in the book. There were 144,000 Israelites ordained "to sing a new song" in the future. Those 144,000 divided by 24 equals 6000 - the number of years which seemingly is assigned to mankind for the period of God's firstfruit activity in His redemption of humanity. At any rate, the singing being done by those saved involves the use of psalms (Rev. 15:3). This shows a distinctive prophetic ring to some of the psalms.

The Levitical singing in the temple, which was established by King David, was certainly prophetic. They "prophesied according to the order of the king" (I Chron. 25:2) - they "prophesied with a harp, to give thanks and to praise the Lord" (verse 3). One of the principal prophets to King David was "Heman the king's seer [prophet] in the words of God, to lift up the horn" (verse 5). Even David himself, who composed most of the psalms in the Bible, was called a prophet by the New Testament (Matt. 27:35). The New Testament also said that Asaph, one of the principal men assigned by David to sing the psalms, was called a prophet too (Matt. 13:35).

We thus have abundant evidence from the Old and New Testaments that the psalms had a prophetic content to them. Many were written by prophets. Indeed, there were more verses quoted in the New Testament from the Book of Psalms which contained prophecies about Christ and of his future role in human affairs, than from any other book of the Old Testament. Christians thought that King David was very typical of Christ. This fact in itself should show that the Book of Psalms is essentially a prophetic book as much as Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel. And truly, when one really comprehends what the various psalms mean - and their relationships to one another within the contexts in which they are placed - a prophetic significance can be seen which is very evident.

Let us now look at the 150 psalms within the Book of Psalms. Their arrangement and contexts should be noted. When surveyed properly, the structure and design might open up some outstanding prophetic teaching that many of us may not have seen before.

The Structure of the Psalms

In the original Hebrew apportionment of the Book of Psalms, the 150 psalms are assorted among five major divisions. These five "books" are not discernable in the ordinary King James Version, but they are evident in the Hebrew manuscripts. The five divisions are as follows:

Psalms 1-41 (Book I)

Psalms 42-72 (Book II)

Psalms 73-89 (Book III)

Psalms 90-106 (Book IV)

Psalms 107-150 (Book V)

The fact that there are five books is significant. The number has a legal and prophetic symbol attached to it. Actually, the original Ten Commandments were divided into 5 and 5 (not 4 and 6 as some imagine today). The first 5 were spiritual (including the honor given to parents) and the last 5 were social (involving relationships with other human beings). Prophetically, we can see its importance in the Book of Isaiah. The prophet gave some sequential references to the destruction coming upon Israel for their evil. Isaiah gave a 5-fold admonition. [One should note the context in which the 5-fold repetitive clause is given to understand the full message of Isaiah.]

1) "For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand [God's hand] is stretched out still" (Isa. 5:25).

2) "For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still" (Isa. 9:12).

3) "For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still" (9:17).

4) "For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still" (9:21).

5) "For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still" (10:4).

This same type of 5-fold prophetic scheme is also found in the Book of Amos. It was intimately connected with prophetic symbolism.

1) "Yet have ye not returned unto me" (4:6).

2) "Yet have ye not returned unto me" (4:8).

3) "Yet have ye not returned unto me" (4:9).

4) "Yet have ye not returned unto me" (4:10).

5) "Yet have ye not returned unto me" (4:11).

The sequential emphasis of the prophet Amos was to build up God's case for the refusal of Israel to follow Him. God finally gives up trying to reform them by saying: "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel" (Amos 4:12). In other words, 5 chances were all that God was going to give them.

The Book of Lamentations, which is a message by Jeremiah concerning the complete destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, was also given in a 5-fold arrangement. The first chapter has 22 verses - each beginning with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and all the letters are in their regular order. Then the second chapter also has the same 22 Hebrew letters heading each verse. The third chapter, however, has 66 verses, yet the same feature is retained - only this time there are three verses beginning with the first Hebrew letter, the next three verses the second letter, etc. until all 22 letters are used up. Finally, chapters four and five have 22 verses, but for some reason these verses do not begin with the Hebrew letters. Nonetheless, the 5-fold division is clearly seen. The number 5 seems to give the theme of the prophecy a sense of certainty or dogmatism. This shows up in the other sections of scripture where the 5-fold arrangement is maintained.

The Law of Moses was also divided into 5 parts: The Book of Genesis (1), The Book of Exodus (2), The Book of Leviticus (3), The Book of Numbers (4), The Book of Deuteronomy (5). This could signify that all the law that was necessary to govern Old Testament Israel was found within these 5-fold legal books.

And now, back to our Book of Psalms. It was also arranged in the 5-fold scheme. In fact, the ancient Jewish scholars saw a comparison between the 5 books of Moses' Law and the 5 divisions of the Book of Psalms. The early commentary on Psalms 1:1 (called by the Hebrews the Midrash) says: "Moses gave to the Israelites the five books of the Law; and corresponding with these David gave them the five books of the Psalms." A good discussion on the resemblance of each of the five divisions is given in the commentaries at the start of the Book of Psalms. We show how they tally in the paragraph below.

Psalms 1-41 (Book I) = Genesis

Psalms 42-72 (Book II) = Exodus

Psalms 73-89 (Book III) = Leviticus

Psalms 90-106 (Book IV) = Numbers

Psalms 107-150 (Book V) = Deuteronomy

But there is yet another 5-fold prophetic division of the Bible which was designed, like the psalms, to be read in the temple at certain times of the year. These were the 5 books in the original Hebrew arrangement of the Old Testament called the Megilloth (Scrolls) to be read at the holyday seasons and on two commemorative days in the Hebrew calendar. The first book was the Song of Songs (to be read at Passover), the second was Ruth (Pentecost), the third was Lamentations (on the 10th of Ab - the day on which the temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in the sixth century B.C. - see Jeremiah 52:12-14; Zech. 7:5; 8:19), the fourth book was Ecclesiastes (read in the period of Tabernacles), and the fifth was Esther (read on Purim - see Esther 9:20-22). Since the holyday periods given to Israel are of prophetic relevance, it follows that the 5 books of the Old Testament assigned to be read at those designated times are a commentary on the meaning of the seasons.

The Passover season (1) shows the redemption of Israel from Egypt, and in the New Testament it was the salvation afforded to Christians by Christ's death on the cross - which occurred at Passover. The Song of Songs was read at that time. Its theme is that of a courtship and its setting is Springtime.

Then, Pentecost (2) shows the beginning of Israel as a nation at Mount Sinai. Within the New Testament, the "church of Christ" began on that day (Acts 2). The Book of Ruth was ordained to be read in the temple and synagogues at that time. It describes Ruth gleaning the firstfruits harvest from the land of Boaz in Judah. The theme of the book fits Pentecost perfectly.

The 10th of Ab (3) was the anniversary day for the destruction of the temple back in the time of Jeremiah. [Remarkably, the temple which was rebuilt by King Herod - the one that existed in the time of Christ - was also destroyed on the exact same day, and quite by accident. It makes one wonder if the day is of more importance in the prophetic chronology than at first meets the eye.] The Book of Lamentations was ordained to be read (II Chron. 35:25) and the 10th of Ab was the day selected for its reading. And what a significant book it was! Its subject was the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

Then came Tabernacles (4). This indicates the time that Israel will be top in the world - under their Messiah. It is a time denoting the Millennium of the New Testament (Rev. 20:3-6). The Book of Ecclesiastes (which describes the peaceful reign of Solomon - a type of the Millennium) was picked to be read at that season.

After that is Purim (5) which shows the complete redemption of the nation of Judah - a central tribe of Israel, and the one responsible for dispensing the message of salvation to the world (John 4:22).

Thus, the three holyday seasons and the two main commemorative periods (5 sanctified times) were graced with 5 books to be read that backed up the significance of their themes. These 5 books (and holyday seasons) also compare interestingly with the 5 divisions of the Psalms and the 5 books of the Mosaic Law. Let us see.

(1) Psalms 1-41 (Book I) = Genesis = Song of Songs (1)

(2) Psalms 42-72 (Book II) = Exodus = Ruth (2)

(3) Psalms 73-89 (Book III) = Leviticus = Lamentations (3)

(4) Psalms 90-106 (Book IV) = Numbers = Ecclesiastes (4)

(5) Psalms 107-150 (Book V) = Deuteronomy = Esther (5)

When these three sections of the Old Testament are compared with one another, there is an amazing parallel in many features. It is almost as if an over-all design was intended by the divine canonizers to show a buttressing effect on the messages found in each book. This may well be. To see this in a clear way, let us focus on Book III of the Psalms. This will equate with the Book of Leviticus in the Law of Moses and the Book of Lamentations in the Megilloth. The third book of psalms comprises those from Psalms 73 to 89 inclusively. Anyone who surveys those 17 psalms can see quite easily that they generally refer, in the main, to the temple at Jerusalem, and usually to its destruction. Note some particular verses in the psalms of Book III which show this.

Psalm 73 = "The sanctuary of God ... they brought into destruction" (verses 17,18).

Psalm 74 = "The enemy hath done wickedly in thy sanctuary.... they have cast fire into thy sanctuary, they have defiled by casting thy dwelling place [the temple] of thy name to the ground" (verses 3,7).

Psalm 75 = "The earth [land] and all the inhabitants thereof are dissolved" (verse 3).

Psalm 76 = "In Salem [Jerusalem] is his tabernacle, and his dwelling place in Zion. There [in Jerusalem] brake he the arrows of the bow" (verses 2,3).

Psalm 77 = "In the day of trouble I sought the Lord.... Will the Lord cast off forever?" (verses 2,7).

Psalm 78 = "He forsook the tabernacle of Shilo [when the temple was once there], the tent which he placed among men" (verse 60).

Psalm 79 = "O God, the heathen are come into thy inheritance; thy holy temple have they defiled ... and there was none to bury them" (verses 1,3). [The latter reference is to the Two Witnesses, as shown in the New Testament. See Rev. 11:9].

More examples from Book III of the Psalms could be given, but this is enough to show that the theme of destruction is the general context of all of those 17 psalms. And what is parallel to Book III of the Psalms? In the Megilloth it is the Book of Lamentations. And, as said before, this book was ordained to be read on the anniversary of the temple's destruction (Jer. 52:12-14; Zech. 7:5; 8:19). There could be no book more apt for comparison to the subject matter of Book III of the Psalms. But these two books are arranged opposite (in their 5-fold structure) to Book III of the Law - the Book of Leviticus. And its theme? It is all about the priesthood and the Levites regarding their duties in the temple. It could hardly be accidental that the books found such an arrangement. The three books support each other in subject matter.

Now look at Book IV of the Psalms. There are also 17 psalms in this division (Psalms 90-106). Psalm 90 introduces its contextual subject by mentioning a 1000 years (verse 4). A thousand years is, of course, a millennium of time. And the general teaching of these 17 psalms is millennial - about the time peace and security will be over all the earth. But before peace can come to the earth, there is the time of the Great Tribulation that must first occur. Psalm 91 describes such a subject in detail. Then, it is followed by Psalm 92 - a psalm for the Sabbath day (note its superscription). The Old Testament Sabbath day (the seventh day of the week) also represented the 7000th year period (after 6000 years of human rule) called in the Book of Revelation the 1000 year time when peace reigns throughout all the earth and Satan is bound in chains (Rev. 20: 2-4). And note! It takes only a cursory reading of the rest of the psalms in Book IV of the Book of Psalms to see the Millennial connection. But also, it must be noted that the Judaic authorities consecrated the Book of Ecclesiastes to be read at the Tabernacles' season. Ecclesiastes described the glories of the Solomonic kingdom (a type of the Millennium) and Tabernacles itself had its spiritual theme as that of the same Millennium.

Book V of the Psalms (Psalms 107-150) is associated with Deuteronomy in the Law. Deuteronomy is called "the second law" or, a recapitulation of the earlier parts of the Law of Moses. And this is what the 44 psalms of Book V denote - a summing up of the subjects from Book I to IV. It is also equalled to the Book of Esther, which shows the complete salvation of the Jewish people. It looks like they will be one of the last nations on earth to finally accept Christ (Rom. 11:25,26). And Book V of the Psalms gives information that could emphasize how God will accomplish this salvation upon those of Israel.

Books I and II of the Psalms are songs composed exclusively by King David. At the end of Psalm 72 is the statement: "The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended." Of course, there are other Davidic psalms in later sections, but this reference indicates that Book I (Psalms 1-41) and Book II (Psalms 42-72) were all written by David.

Let us now note this interesting feature. The number of the Davidic psalms are 72 (that is 24 x 3). Since King David arranged the Levitical singers into 24 "wards" (I Chron. 25:8-31), it can be seen as being very likely that these first 72 psalms were established to fit a pattern of singing them in order by the Levites who found themselves positioned by David into 24 divisions.

Look at these psalms. In Book I there are 41 psalms. If one reckons the first psalm as introductory, then there are 40 psalms left. The number 40 is a number of trial. [We have given evidence of this in our December, 1978 Commentator.] But in Book II there are 31 psalms. If one allows the first psalm of the second book to

be introductory, then there are 30 psalms left. When one adds 40 and 30 together (equallying 70), one has the exact age of David when he died. The age of 70 is also considered in Psalm 90 as the ideal length of man's life on earth (Psa. 90:10). And isn't it interesting that Psalm 71:18 (next to the last psalm in the Davidic collection) records David as saying: "Now also when I am old and greyheaded." Then, the next psalm (the last one of Book II), concerns the glories of the Solomonic kingdom which was to occur at the death of David.

And too, Book I of the Psalms corresponds to the Song of Songs which was sung at the Passover season. The whole of the 41 psalms (1 plus 40) relate to this theme. Note, as an example, Psalm 22 which says that the wicked "pierced my hands and my feet" (verse 16). This reference, in prophecy, referred to the crucifixion of Christ - who died at the Passover! Also, since Israel came out of Egypt at Passover, the 40 psalms of Book I (after the introductory one) probably denote the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. The 30 psalms of Book II (after the introductory one) may show the 30 years for the establishing of the nation of Israel in the land of Canaan - and this took exactly 30 years from their crossing of the River Jordan to the death of Joshua.

Conclusion

None of us can know for certain why the psalms in the Book of Psalms are arranged the way they are. Certainly, there is a reason behind their positioning because some of the psalms were repeated in other sections. Psalm 14 and Psalm 53 are virtually the same in content, yet one occurs in Book I and the other in Book II. Also, Psalm 70 is parallel with Psalm 40:13-17 and Psalm 60:9-12 with Psalm 108:10-13. In fact, with Psalms 9 and 10 there is an acrostic feature (the use of Hebrew letters at the beginning of verses - like in the Book of Lamentations) which shows that the two separate psalms were at one time one psalm. See the commentaries for proof of this. This all helps to show that there is a definite reason why the psalms were positioned in the way that they were. It is not the simple message that they give that is all the truth, it is the context in which they occur that makes the difference.

And since it can be shown that the psalms in the Book of Psalms are basically of a prophetic nature, it looks like a prophetic theme is to be found within the 5-fold divisions of the Psalms. We can sum up, succinctly, what it might mean.

The 41 (1 plus 40) psalms of Book I seem to refer to Passover - the beginning of Israel as a nation, and the start of the New Testament scheme of salvation with the death and resurrection of Christ. Book II is equated with Pentecost - the feast of the first-fruits. It shows Israel as a corporate body in the land of Israel, and it also can refer to the creation of the New Testament church and the spreading of the Gospel to the world. Book III is almost totally devoted to describing the destruction of Israel and the temple (both in 586 B.C. and in A.D. 70). This is a subject that parallels the prophecy of the Great Tribulation in the Book of Revelation very well.

Indeed, some of the teachings about that great time of trouble are reflective of verses found within this section of the psalms. Book IV of the psalms shows Israel regathered after their ruin (as demonstrated in the context of Book III). This book concerns the Millennium which is prophesied to happen after the ruin of the Israelitish system in Palestine just before the return of Christ to earth. And finally, Book V is equated with the feast of Purim - the time when Judah (all Israel) shall be delivered - as they were in the Persian period as recorded in the Book of Esther. Book V is also similar to that of Deuteronomy in the sense that it combines all the major features of the first four books.

Since there are 150 psalms in the entire collection (3 x 50) there may have been a three-year reading plan—a reading of a psalm for each of the 150 weeks to correspond with the triennial reading of the Law and the Prophets in the temple (Acts 13:15). This possibility has been suggested in the Jewish Encyclopaedia [1911], Vol. 12, under article Triennial Cycle. This could well be one of the reasons for the positioning of the psalms in the manner they are.

The main thing to recognize, however, is that there is far more teaching in the Book of Psalms than at first meets the eye. No one knows for sure just what every detail is trying to reveal. Yet, when one realizes that a consistency of doctrinal and prophetic emphasis is found throughout the Old Testament, it could be that the Psalms are a simple reflection of that fact.

These suggestions are intended as a preliminary survey of the various 5-fold sections which are found in the Old Testament. We should recall that the New Testament also has a 5-fold "Pentateuch" of the Gospels and Acts, and that Matthew's Gospel is arranged in a 5-fold structure. It appears, when one studies them closely, that these designs are not haphazardly formed, but that some kind of message is intended by their application in matters of interpretation. Certainly, further research among scholars and biblical students is needed to comprehend these matters in a better way. Such study, however, would be facilitated if people will retain the manuscript order of the biblical books rather than the arbitrary one that is now being presented to the world. We hope that the information in this book can prove to be an incentive to accomplish this task.

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