



BIBLE

STUDENT BOOK

▶ **7th Grade | Unit 6**

BIBLE 706

The Psalms

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The Psalms

Introduction

The Book of Psalms is the largest book in the Bible. It contains 150 Psalms, and each psalm is a chapter of the Bible. It has the longest chapter (Psalm 119 with 176 verses) and the shortest chapter (Psalm 117 with 2 verses). The Psalms are also one of the most beautiful parts of the Bible. The Psalms are primarily prayers. These prayers incorporate just about every human emotion possible, from the greatest joy and praise to the most profound sorrow and despair. Athanasius, one of the great Christian leaders of the early church in the fourth century, said that the rest of Scripture is God's Word to us, but the Psalms are God's Word for us. By this he meant that the Psalms are God-given prayers for us to pray. Furthermore, the Psalms help teach us how to pray.

In Old Testament times, Jewish people originally composed the Psalms. David, who became the great king of the Jewish people, composed many of the Psalms. Other Jewish people, including Moses and Solomon, also wrote Psalms. Many people had a hand in writing and collecting the 150 Psalms that we have today. Through it all, God was the One inspiring the writing and collecting of these ancient prayers. We can be sure that the Psalms are, indeed, God's Word to us and for us.

Throughout the history of the church, the Psalms have been considered the church's primary "prayer book." Jesus Himself prayed the Psalms, and He quoted the Psalms during His ministry (for example, in Mark 15:34, Jesus quotes Psalm 22:1 on the cross). If the church has found the Psalms to be a good source of prayer, it is because God inspired these prayers to nourish the life of the church and the life of the individual Christian. Furthermore, the church has always seen Christ throughout the Psalms. Jesus also showed the disciples that the Psalms referred to Him in many places (Luke 22:44).

It is important to know about the Psalms. The purpose of this LIFEPAC® is to help you learn much more about the Book of Psalms. It is even more important to learn to pray the Psalms. By studying this LIFEPAC, you will not only learn much more about the Psalms, but you will also come to love the Psalms more and pray them more. The Psalms are God-inspired prayers that can help you grow closer to God all the days of your life.

In this LIFEPAC, you will learn more about what Psalms are. You will learn about the history of the Psalms and the types of Psalms. In Section Two, you will learn about Hebrew poetry, since the Psalms are actually examples of Hebrew poetry. Finally, in the last section of this LIFEPAC, you will study one psalm—Psalm 100—in much detail, in order to help you explore the riches contained in God's Word through the Psalms.

Objectives

Read these objectives. The objectives tell you what you will be able to do when you have successfully completed this LIFEPAC. When you have finished this LIFEPAC, you should be able to:

1. Describe the Psalms and tell what they are.
2. Describe the history of the Book of Psalms.
3. Identify the types of Psalms.
4. Explain the use of the Psalms.
5. Summarize the variety of Hebrew poetry in the Old Testament.
6. Compare and contrast the parallels of Hebrew poetry.
7. Explain the patterns of Hebrew poetry.
8. Identify the Hebrew poetry of Psalm 100.
9. Describe the history and explain the meaning of Psalm 100.

1. THE BOOK OF PSALMS

God is the object of the Psalms. As David writes in Psalm 62:1–2, “Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defence; I shall not be greatly moved.” All of the 150 Psalms of the Bible are ultimately about God. The Psalms express in poetic form the drama of human relationships with God, especially as lived by the people of Israel. We learn much about God and ourselves in the Psalms.

The Psalms are chiefly about God and our relationship with Him. They tell of all kinds of events concerning the people of Israel and God.

Read Psalm 62.



The Psalms are about God and the relationship he has with His people. They are prayers and songs from individuals and groups of people to God.

In this section of the LIFEPAK, you will learn much more about the Book of Psalms. You will explore the question: What are the Psalms? You will learn about the history of the Psalms. Finally, you will learn about the types of Psalms and their use.

Section Objectives

Review these objectives. When you have completed this section, you should be able to:

1. Describe the Psalms and tell what they are.
2. Describe the history of the Book of Psalms.
3. Identify the types of Psalms.
4. Explain the use of the Psalms.

Vocabulary

Study these words. Learning the meanings of these words is a good study habit and will improve your understanding of this LIFEPAK.

anatomy (ə nat' ə ē). The structure or inner part.

anonymous (ə non' ə mäs). The author's name is unknown.

ascend (ə send'). To move gradually upward.

attributed (ə trib' yüt ed). Assigned or considered as belonging to another.

exaltation (eg zôl tã' shən). An act of exalting, or elevating in praise.

extols (ik stôls'). Praises highly or glorifies.

formation (fôr mã' shən). An act (or acts) of giving form or shape to something.

laments (lə mentz'). Having sorrow for or mourning.

precepts (prē' septs). Rules, laws, directions.

predominates (pri dom' ə nãts). Exerts controlling power or influence.

Psalter (säl' tər). The Book of Psalms in the Old Testament.

seer (sē' ər). Someone who receives messages from God through visions or dreams.

Septuagint (sep tōō' ə jint). The Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament accomplished in Alexandria, Egypt about 250 BC

symbolizes (sim' bə līz iz). Represents, expresses, or identifies by a symbol.

topical (top' i kəl). Of, relating to, or arranged by topics.

Note: All vocabulary words in this LIFEPAK appear in **boldface** print the first time they are used. If you are unsure of the meaning when you are reading, study the definitions given.

Pronunciation Key: hat, āge, cāre, fār; let, ēqual, tēm; it, īce; hot, ōpen, ōrder; oil; out; cup, pūt, rüle; child; long; thin; /ʒh/ for then; /zh/ for measure; /ə/ represents /a/ in about, /e/ in taken, /i/ in pencil, /o/ in lemon, and /u/ in circus.



What are the Psalms?

The words “Psalms” and “**Psalter**” (as the Book of Psalms is sometimes called) come to us from the Greek translation of the Bible known as the **Septuagint**. The Greek word most used in that translation for the writings we have in the Book of Psalms was *psalmoi*, referring to “songs

sung to the accompaniment of stringed instruments.” Therefore, the very name “Psalms” helps us to begin to answer the question: What are the Psalms? They are religious songs, written by various ancient Jewish authors. Most of the Psalms were originally intended to be

accompanied by stringed instruments that are plucked, such as the harp, lyre, psaltery, or zither.

The Hebrew word used for these writings of the Bible was *tehillim*, meaning “praises.” This word also helps us understand that many of the Psalms are songs of praise to God.

The Psalms are also *prayers*. In fact, one of the first collections of the Psalms in the Bible was titled “The prayers of David, the son of Jesse” (Psalm 72:20). As mentioned in the introduction of this LIFEPAAC, the Psalms were given to us by God as prayers inspired by Him. The Psalms are not only prayers, they help us learn how to pray. They express in all forms of human language and emotion the prayers of God’s people.

Finally, the Psalms are also *Hebrew poetry*. The Psalms were written in the distinctive fashion of Hebrew poetry. Almost one-third of the Old Testament was written in the form of Hebrew poetry, so there are many other passages outside the Book of Psalms that use Hebrew poetry. Much more will be said about the Psalms as Hebrew poetry in Section Two of this LIFEPAAC.

It should be noted that *Psalms* are found in other parts of the Old Testament, too, not only in the Book of Psalms. A few of the many examples of other Psalms in the Old Testament are:

1. **The Song of the Sea** (Exodus 15:1–18) celebrates God’s deliverance of the Israelites from the Egyptians at the Red Sea.
2. **The Song of Moses** (Deuteronomy 32:1–43) contrasts God’s faithfulness with Israel’s unfaithfulness.
3. **The Song of Hannah** (1 Samuel 2:1–10) is a psalm of thanksgiving to God.
4. **David’s Song of Deliverance** (2 Samuel 22:2–51) is a psalm of thanksgiving. It is also preserved as Psalm 18 in the Book of Psalms.
5. **King Hezekiah’s Song** (Isaiah 38:9–20) is a thanksgiving psalm used when presenting a thank offering in the Temple.
6. **Jonah’s Prayer from the belly of the fish** (Jonah 2:2–9) is actually a psalm of thanksgiving!
7. **The Prayer of Habakkuk** (Habakkuk 3:2–19) is a hymn praising God for divine victory on behalf of the people Israel.



Complete the following statements.

- 1.1 The Book of Psalms is the a. _____ book in the Bible, and it contains b. _____ Psalms.
- 1.2 The Psalms are primarily _____.
- 1.3 The Psalms help teach us how to _____.
- 1.4 The church has always seen _____ throughout the Psalms.
- 1.5 The Greek word *psalmoi* referred to “_____ the accompaniment of stringed instruments.”
- 1.6 The Hebrew word used for these writings of the Bible was *tehillim*, meaning _____.



Complete the following activities.

1.7 Describe three characteristics of the Psalms that help answer the question:

“What are the Psalms?”

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

1.8 There are Psalms in the Bible that are outside the Book of Psalms. Choose one of these Psalms—either one of the seven noted in this section or another of your choosing—and tell the way(s) this psalm describes the relationship between the psalmist(s) of God.

My choice of the Psalm outside the Book of Psalms: _____

Describe the relationship between the psalmist(s) and God: _____

TEACHER CHECK

_____ initials

_____ date

Organization of the Psalter. The Book of Psalms is actually composed of several *collections* of Psalms. It consists of five distinct “books” or collections of Psalms. Each one of these five books concludes with a **doxology**. Psalm 150, which concludes the last of the five books, is actually a fitting doxology to the entire Psalter.

The organization of the Book of Psalms into five books is as shown in Table 1.

The arrangement of the Psalms into these five books was probably in imitation of the five books of Moses (the Torah) found in the beginning of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). Some people find a general likeness in themes or topics of the five books of the Psalms when they are

compared to the corresponding five books of Moses. This topical likeness is shown in Table 2.

The whole Book of Psalms ends with a wonderful psalm of praise. It begins with two Psalms that are keynotes to the faith of the people of Israel. Psalm 1 opens the Psalter and extols the virtue of meditating on the Law of God (the Torah). Psalm 2 offers a meditation on the Messiah (literally, “the Anointed One”). These two themes—the will of God in the Law and the future coming of the Messiah to begin God’s Kingdom—were the two most important beliefs of the Jewish people at the time the Psalter was arranged in its final form. You will learn more about the history and formation of the Book of Psalms in the next part of this Section of the LIFEPAAC.

Book I	Psalms 1-41	Concluding doxology: Psalms 41:13
Book II	Psalms 42-72	Concluding doxology: Psalms 72:18-19
Book III	Psalms 73-89	Concluding doxology: Psalms 89:52
Book IV	Psalms 90-106	Concluding doxology: Psalms 106:48
Book V	Psalms 107-150	Concluding doxology for the entire Psalter: Psalms 150

| Table 1: Organization of the Book of Psalms

Book of Psalms	Book I (1-42)	Book II (42-72)	Book III (73-89)	Book IV (90-106)	Book V (107-150)
Book of Moses	Genesis	Exodus	Leviticus	Numbers	Deuteronomy
Topical Likeness	Man and Creation	Deliverance and Redemption	Worship and Sanctuary	Wilderness and Wandering	Scripture and Praise

| Table 2: Topical themes of the Books of Psalms and the Law of Moses



Complete the following activities.

1.9 For each one of the five books of Psalms, find an example of a Psalm in that book that fits the topical theme noted in Table 1. Explain briefly how the example Psalm fits the theme.

a. Book I – Man and Creation example: _____

Explanation: _____

b. Book II – Deliverance and Redemption example: _____

Explanation: _____

c. Book III – Worship and Sanctuary example: _____

Explanation: _____

d. Book IV – Wilderness and Wandering example: _____

Explanation: _____

e. Book V – Scripture and Praise example: _____

Explanation: _____

1.10 Read Psalm 2. Explain how this psalm would describe the Messiah and Jesus Christ. _____

TEACHER CHECK

_____ initials

_____ date

History of the Psalms

The earliest Psalm is **attributed** to Moses (Psalm 90) and has been dated by some scholars at 1440 BC, when Moses led Israel out of Egypt. David wrote most of the Psalms in the Psalter. At least seventy-three of the Psalms are attributed to David. David reigned over Israel from about 1010 BC to 970 BC. Therefore, we can date many of the Psalms around those dates. Some of the Psalms were attributed to David's son, Solomon (Psalms 72 and 127). Others were written during Solomon's reign as king over Israel from 970 BC to 930 BC (Psalms 88 and 89).

Of the several Psalms written by **anonymous** authors, some are dated later in Israel's history. Many scholars believe that the longest of the Psalms—Psalm 119—was written at the time of the Babylonian captivity in 586 BC. Psalm 137 was also written during this period of exile (586–538 BC). Psalms 107 and 126 were written as praises sung when the Jews returned from exile to the Holy Land about 538 BC. Psalm 147:13 praises God, "For he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed thy children within thee." This praise could refer to the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem by Nehemiah about 444 BC.

From knowledge about the men who wrote many of the Psalms and the times in which they lived, we can date the Psalms from at least the period of 1440 BC to 444 BC. Therefore, we can see that the Psalms were written over a period of at least one thousand years!

Even though the Psalms had human writers, the true author of the Psalms was God. God inspired the Psalms just as much as He did any other part of the Scriptures. God used the writers of the Psalms to help human beings sing His own praises. God used the personality and character of men such as David and added to them the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This allowed the psalmists and others to sing accurate and eternal truths about God.



| Moses wrote the earliest Psalm (Psalm 90).

Real people, real problems, and real situations are mentioned in the Psalms. This is part of the reason the Psalms can become our own prayers. We can relate to the people, problems, and situations that the psalmists faced. For example, when David fled from his son, Absalom, he prayed (Psalm 63:1), "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is." When David recognized his sin, he cried out to God (Psalm 51:2), "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin." The richness of the Psalms is found in their reality of human experience. They speak of great problems and of great faith in God.



Answer true or false.

- 1.11 _____ The earliest Psalm is attributed to Solomon.
- 1.12 _____ David wrote most of the Psalms in the Psalter.
- 1.13 _____ All of the Old Testament Psalms are found in the Book of Psalms.
- 1.14 _____ Psalm 147 may be one of the most recent Psalms, written in the time of Nehemiah.
- 1.15 _____ The richness of the Psalms is found in their reality of human experience.
- 1.16 _____ The Psalms were written over a period of less than five hundred years.
- 1.17 _____ Psalm 2 describes the Messiah.

Match these items.

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 1.18 _____ God | a. oldest Psalm |
| 1.19 _____ David | b. a doxology Psalm |
| 1.20 _____ Psalm 119 | c. written by David after he sinned |
| 1.21 _____ Psalm 107 | d. Psalm written during the time after the exile |
| 1.22 _____ Psalm 90 | e. true author of the Psalms |
| 1.23 _____ Psalm 51 | f. written during the Babylonian captivity |
| 1.24 _____ Psalm 150 | g. wrote seventy-three Psalms |
| | h. the longest Psalm |

Formation of the Psalter. We have seen that the 150 Psalms of the Psalter were written over a period of a thousand years. During this time, and extending beyond it for almost 200 years, various collections of the Psalms were assembled. In other words, the Psalter went through a long process of **formation** to get to the current organization of the Psalms that we have today. We can say that the Psalter underwent a few stages (or steps) of formation over a long period of time. This process of formation did not happen by accident. God's guiding hand and inspiration was upon the writers of the Psalms, and it was also upon those who



| The Holy Spirit inspired the writers of the Psalms.



| David wrote most of the Psalms.

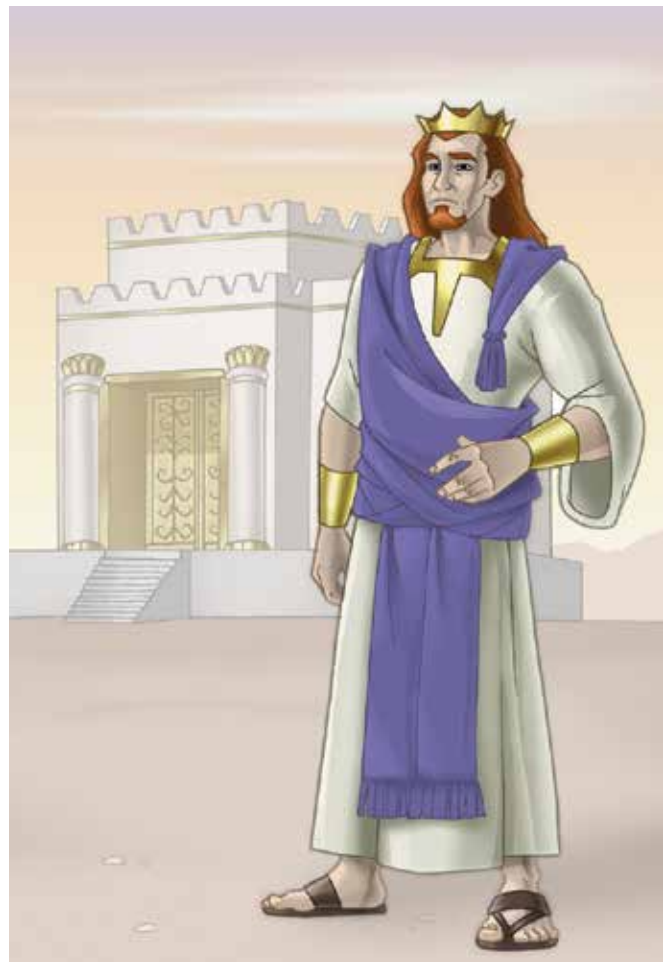
participated in each stage of the formation of the Psalter.

Before we describe these stages of formation of the Psalter, it is helpful to compare the formation process to something more familiar, like a river. Initially, a river starts when many small springs are collected together to form a creek. A creek, in turn, is joined with other small creeks to form a small river. This small river eventually flows together with other small river branches to form a larger river. Finally, the large river is widened further as other small rivers and springs flow into it on its way to the sea.

The river **symbolizes** the way that the Book of Psalms were started and then collected together over time. The Holy Spirit inspired individual psalmists, like David, to compose a

psalm. This psalm was then joined with other Psalms to form a small collection of Psalms. Eventually, these small collections of Psalms were joined with other small collections to form a larger collection of Psalms. The larger collections were gathered together as other later Psalms were added to form the five books of the Psalms. Finally, these five books of Psalms were given their completed form to make up the Psalter as we have it today.

In the first stage of the formation of the Psalter, each Psalm began with an individual. Men like King David were moved and inspired by the Spirit of God to write a prayer or compose a song concerning a real problem, event, or situation. For example, when God delivered David



| Solomon and others of his time wrote Psalms.

from the wrath of Saul, David prayed (Psalm 18:1–2), “I will love thee, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.” David wrote down the words of his inspired prayer. This prayer was such an inspiration to God’s faithfulness that those who heard it or read it were moved to repeat it and make it their own. Eventually, the Psalm was used as part of the public worship of the people of Israel, first at the Tabernacle of David and later at the Temple of Solomon. In this way, many Psalms began as the God-inspired response of one person to a specific situation, but it later became the response of many people to situations in general.

The second stage in the formation of the Psalter was the formation of individual songs into special groups used for public worship. In 2 Chronicles 29:30, we read, “Moreover Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise unto the LORD with the words of David, and of Asaph the **seer**. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped.” This Scripture passage mentions two collections of Psalms that were assembled by then: one collection by David and the other by Asaph the seer. In King Hezekiah’s day (715 BC–686 BC), the Psalms may have been arranged according to their writers. These collections of writings would be used in formal and public worship. Through these collections of Psalms, God was preserving these wonderful prayers and praises for His People.

The third stage in the formation of the Psalter occurred later, when faithful men reorganized the smaller collections of Psalms within the Psalms. These were arranged over a long period of time. The Holy Spirit continued to preserve these Psalms by their formation into larger books. This stage probably continued through the time of the Babylonian Exile and afterwards.

The fourth and final stage in the formation of the Psalter occurred after the Temple had been rebuilt in Jerusalem (after 516 BC) and probably after Nehemiah came to rebuild the city of Jerusalem (about 445 BC). The final assembly of the Psalter was probably accomplished by a small group of men or even by one man. This arrangement had the Psalms organized into the five books that we have already observed, each with a beautiful doxology at the end. The entire collection ended with six Psalms (Psalms 145–150) which resound with praise for God.

Transmission of the Psalter. Although the Psalms were written and collected over a thousand-year period, they have actually been preserved and **transmitted** to us over a much longer period. Once the Psalter was completed, it had to be handed on to successive generations. The transmission of the Psalms has occurred faithfully over three thousand years because God has promised that they will **endure**. Recall that Jesus promised in (Matthew 5:18), “For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.” The Psalms of the Old Testament are part of the Word of God, and we have the Lord’s promise that the Word of God will last.

During the years between the completion of the Old Testament writings and the beginning of the new Testament period, Jewish writers made mention of the books of David. Some of these men of the *intertestamental period* quoted directly from some of the Psalms. In this way, some of the writings of the Psalms were preserved and transmitted. In addition, after the Old Testament was completed, Jewish scribes were assigned the task of hand copying the books of the Old Testament, including the Psalms. These scribes took great care in making exact copies of the Old Testament books.

This is how the careful system of copying and transmitting the Old Testament books in Hebrew occurred. The chief scribes used a numerical system to check on the work of the



| The scribes carefully copied the Old Testament.

younger scribes. When a copy of the Book of Psalms was made, after months of painstaking writing, a chief scribe would count every word, then every letter. He knew how many letters and words were in the original book. If the copy did not contain the correct number of words and letters, it was rejected and destroyed. The chief scribe also knew the middle letter and middle word of each of the Books of Psalms, and if these did not match the original, the copy was destroyed. In this careful way, the Hebrew writings containing the Psalter were transmitted down through the centuries.

In about 250 BC, there were many Jews living in Alexandria, Egypt. Most of these Jews spoke Greek, so they desired a translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek. Therefore, about seventy-two Greek-speaking Hebrew scholars translated the Hebrew Old Testament, including the Book of Psalms, into the Greek language. This Greek translation of the Old Testament became known as the Septuagint (referring to the “seventy” scholars who accomplished the translation). Thus, not only

were accurate copies of the Psalms available in Hebrew, but also in Greek. As noted earlier in this section, it is from the Greek words of the Septuagint translation that we get the words “psalm” and “Psalter.”

After the time of Jesus Christ, men inspired by the Holy Spirit began the writings that make up the New Testament. As they did so, the Psalms were used extensively in their writings. Ninety-three quotations from the Book of Psalms can be found in the New Testament. In this way, too, parts of the Psalms were included in the New Testament writings and transmitted to future generations. It is also interesting to note that over half the prophecies fulfilled by Jesus Christ are found in the Book of Psalms. Truly, the Psalms are part of Christian life and belief.

With the birth of Christianity, the prayers and praises of the Psalms became even more popular. The early Christians used the Psalms in their worship of the risen Lord, Jesus Christ. The writings of many of the early churchmen contained many references and quotes from

the Psalms. Ordination of pastors in the early church sometimes required the applicant for the office to have memorized most of the Book of Psalms. In the 3rd and 4th centuries of Christianity, many Christians went to the deserts of Egypt, Palestine, and Syria to live a life devoted to prayer, and they prayed all 150 Psalms each day—normally from memory! When the Bible was to be translated into another language, the

Book of Psalms was one of the first books to be translated. Even today, when copies of the New Testament are made for Christian use and evangelization, the Psalms are usually added to the copy of the New Testament. Christians, hungry for praises to sing and pray to God, have turned to the Psalms for nearly two thousand years!



Write the letter of the correct answer in the blank.

- 1.25** The 150 Psalms of the Psalter were written over a period of more than _____ years.
 a. a hundred b. five hundred c. seven hundred d. a thousand
- 1.26** The stages of formation of the Psalter may be compared to a(n) _____.
 a. mountain b. river c. iceberg d. landslide
- 1.27** In the first stage of the formation of the Psalter, each Psalm began with _____.
 a. an individual b. David c. music d. Hezekiah
- 1.28** The second stage in the formation of the Psalter was the formation of _____.
 a. a group of men to write more Psalms
 b. individual songs into special groups used for public worship
 c. new Psalms by David's son, Solomon
 d. the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem
- 1.29** The third stage in the formation of the Psalter occurred as _____ were later reorganized by faithful men in the books of the Psalms.
 a. the writings of the prophets b. the songs of Solomon
 c. the smaller collections of Psalms d. more new God-inspired Psalms
- 1.30** The final assembly of the Psalter was probably accomplished by _____.
 a. David and his soldiers
 b. the succeeding kings of Judah over many years
 c. a small group of men or even by one man
 d. the early Christians as they began to worship

- 1.31** The transmission of the Psalms has occurred faithfully over three thousand years because _____ .
- God has promised that they will endure
 - ingenious ways have been found to preserve them
 - people are lucky to have good memory skills
 - old copies have been found with the original writings
- 1.32** The Greek translation of the Old Testament made about 250 BC in Alexandria became known as the _____ .
- standard text of the Bible
 - Septuagint
 - Vulgate
 - orthodox Bible

Answer true or false.

- 1.33** _____ The order of Psalms follows no plan or purpose.
- 1.34** _____ Jesus promised that the Word of God, including the Psalms, would be preserved.
- 1.35** _____ Jewish scribes helped preserve the Book of Psalms through careful copying over the centuries.
- 1.36** _____ There are about ninety-three quotes from the Psalms in the New Testament.
- 1.37** _____ Some Christians in the early church prayed all 150 Psalms each day from memory.

Answer these questions.

- 1.38** How did Jewish Scribes check the work done when copies were made of the Old Testament?

- 1.39** What are some ways that Christians preserved the Psalms? _____

Types of Psalms

There is a rich variety of Psalms spread throughout the Psalter. There are groups of Psalms that share the same characteristics and structure. Since this is so, many people have classified the Psalms into “types.” You will now learn about the various *types* of Psalms. It should be noted that various Bible scholars and churches may have other names and groupings for the types of Psalms; however, the types given in this LIFEPAAC are generally agreed upon today by most commentators.

The major types of Psalms fall into three categories: *hymns*, **laments**, and *thanksgiving*. In addition to the major types of Psalms, there are other types of Psalms. For example, the Royal (Messianic) Psalms, Wisdom Psalms, and others will be discussed later in this section. Some of the Psalms will fit into more than one type or category of Psalms.

In the following discussion of Psalm types, we will list the typical Psalms in each one of the categories. We will also comment on the structure of these Psalm types, while recognizing that each Psalm will not always incorporate every aspect of typical structure for that Psalm type.

Let us first examine the three major types of Psalms:

Hymns. Hymn psalms are songs of praise of God. While many of these hymns are the prayers of individuals, it seems that most of them were composed for public worship at Israel’s major festivals. The reasons for praising God allow us to further categorize the hymns as (1) general Hymns of Praise, (2) Hymns of the Lord’s Kingship, and (3) Songs of Zion.

The general *Hymns of Praise* include the following Psalms: 8, 19, 29, 33, 100, 103, 104, 111, 113, 114, 117, 135, 136, and 145–150. The structure of this type of Psalm is quite simple and has three basic parts, as follows:

- I. *Introduction.* The Call to Worship and Praise. The hymn opens with a call to the community, or to the individual himself—to come and praise the Lord and Worship Him.
- II. *Main Section.* The Reason or Motive for Praise. In this main section of the Psalms, the reason or motive for praising God is stated. Depending upon the Psalm, God is praised for His glorious majesty in creation (for example, Ps. 8) or in history, especially for what He has done for the people of Israel (for example, Ps. 114).
- III. *Conclusion.* Repetition of the Call to Praise. The general hymn often ends with a repetition of the initial call to praise, although there may be a closing exaltation of God or a plea for God’s blessing.

Hymns of the Lord’s Kingship are a second sub-category of Hymn Psalms. They include Psalms 47, 93, and 95–99. These Psalms focus on the Lord, the universal King. They are sometimes called the “Enthronement Psalms.” Their structure usually fits well with the one for the general hymns of praise.

The *Songs of Zion* are a third sub-category of hymns. They include Psalms 46, 48, 76, 84, 87, and 122. These hymns extol Zion (the name for the Temple mount or Jerusalem in general) as God’s holy mountain and Jerusalem as the City in which God chose to dwell. The structure of these Psalms does not include the introduction or conclusion typical of hymns; however, the main section of the Psalm still praises and celebrates the mighty God who protects Zion and dwells there.

Laments. Nearly a third of all the Psalms in the Psalter fit this type of Psalm. A Lament Psalm usually has the psalmist or community in a situation of trial, suffering, and/or distress. The psalmist “laments” the predicament; that is, he expresses sorrow or distress over the situation.

However, what characterizes most of these Psalms is not the distress or sorrow but the *confidence* that God can change the situation if He chooses to intervene.

There are two sub-categories of Lament Psalms: individual and community. *Individual laments* were probably prayerful responses to personal misfortunes, illness, sin, or persecution. Psalms that can be classified as individual laments are the following: 3–7, 13, 17, 22, 25–28, 31, 35, 36, 38–40, 42, 43, 51, 52, 54–57, 59, 61, 63, 64, 69–71, 77, 86, 88, 102, 109, 120, 130, and 140–143.

Community laments were probably written for occasions when the people gathered to pray and (perhaps) fast in times of national humiliation and distress. These community laments often recalled God’s marvelous deeds in the past in order to instill confidence in God’s help for the present circumstances. Community laments would include these Psalms: 12, 14, 44, 53, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 89, 90, 94, 106, 123, 126, and 137.

Some of the Lament Psalms, both from the individual and communal varieties, are sometimes difficult to understand and difficult for Christians to pray. They are called the **imprecatory** or “cursing” Psalms (5, 11, 12, 35, 58, 59, 69, 70, 83, 109, 137, and 140). In these, the psalmists cry out for vindication and judgement against their enemies.

Lament Psalms, both individual and community, usually exhibit a definite structure. There are variations to the structure in some of the Psalms, but the general six-part structure of the Lament Psalms is as follows:

- I. *Address to God.* God’s name is usually invoked with a brief cry, although sometimes this may expand into praise or the recalling of God’s past deeds.
- II. *Lament or Complaint.* A description of the present situation or need is expressed to God. The individual or community

describes the present trial, sorrow, or problem.

- III. *Confession of Confidence.* This is an expression of confidence or trust in God in spite of the present circumstances.
- IV. *Petition.* The psalmist petitions God to intervene and deliver, sometimes adding reasons to support the requests.
- V. *Words of Assurance.* The individual or community’s trust in God finds expression in the certainty that the prayer will be heard and answered. These “words of assurance” were sometimes actually spoken by a priest or prophet in the communal celebration of the Psalm (for example, Psalm 12:5).
- VI. *Vow or Exclamation of Praise.* Confident that God hears and answers, the psalmist vows to call upon the name of the Lord, or actually praises the Lord in response to the “words of assurance.”

As can be seen from the overall structure of these Lament Psalms, these cries of distress are motivated by the confidence and trust that God is compassionate and will hear and answer our prayers.

Thanksgiving. Some of the Thanksgiving Psalms are not always easy to distinguish as a particular type. These may actually contain parts that are similar to the Lament Psalms, but the aspects of confidence and trust **predominate** the theme of these Psalms. For this reason, a number of Psalms have been grouped into a sub-category of Thanksgiving Psalms that is sometimes called the “Psalms of Trust.” Like Laments, these Psalms of Trust can be either individual or community. The individual Psalms of Trust include Psalms 4, 11, 16, 23, 62, 91, 121, and 131. The communal Songs of Trust are Psalms 115, 125, and 129.

There are other general Psalms of Thanksgiving, which are distinct sub-categories from the Psalms of Trust. Like the Laments and Psalms of Trust, they can be either individual or

communal. The general Psalms of Thanksgiving written as individual Psalms are 9, 10, 30, 32, 34, 41, 92, 116, and 138. Thanksgiving Psalms of the communal variety are Psalms 65–68, 75, 107, 118, and 124.

The nature of the content, rather than the structure, characterizes the thanksgiving type of Psalm. Thanksgiving Psalms are similar to Hymns in that they **extol** the marvelous works of God. They differ in the sentiments evoked. Hymns call for praise. Thanksgiving Psalms express gratitude.

In general, the structure of a Thanksgiving Psalm is in three parts:

- I. *Introduction*. An indication is given of the psalmist’s intention to give thanks to God.
- II. *Main Section*. This is a telling of the psalmist’s experience.
 - A. Description of the distress that the psalmist once experienced
 - B. The psalmist’s cry for help
 - C. The deliverance from trouble
- III. *Conclusion*. The psalmist again testifies to God’s gracious act of favor or deliverance. A prayer for future help, or a confession that God is gracious, or some other formula may be added.



Complete the following activities.

1.40 List the three major types of Psalms.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

1.41 What are the three sub-categories of hymns?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

1.42 Describe what is meant by a “Lament” Psalm. _____

1.43 Explain how a Thanksgiving Psalm is similar to a Hymn Psalm and how it is different.

a. Similar: _____

b. Different: _____

1.44 Explain what an “Imprecatory” Psalm is and what type of Psalm it is.

a. Explanation _____

b. Type: _____

1.45 Choose one of the Psalms listed as a lament. Write your choice here:

Using the six-part structure of the lament as described in this Section, examine your Psalm verse by verse and write in the verse numbers that fit with the structure of the lament in the Table provided. NOTE: Some of the Lament Psalms will not have all the parts of this structure, and some parts of the structure may be utilized more than once.

Part of Lament Structure	Verses Fitting Structure
I. Address to God	
II. Lament or Complaint	
III. Confession of Confidence	
IV. Petition	
V. Words of Assurance	
VI. Vow or Exclamation of Praise	

TEACHER CHECK

_____ initials

_____ date

The majority of the Psalms fit into the three main types: Hymns, Laments, or Thanksgivings. You will now learn about some other types of Psalms found in the Psalter. Among them are the Royal (Messianic) Psalms and the Wisdom Psalms. The basic content and examples of these other Psalm types will be discussed, but not their structures.

Royal Psalms. The Royal Psalms are those in which the king of Israel is either the speaker or the focus of attention. Among these are the following Psalms: 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 101, 110, 132, and 144. The Psalms are also called “Messianic” Psalms since they also describe a future king and “anointed one” who would be the perfect king. Jesus Christ fulfills these Psalms

as the Messiah. He is also the “priest forever” as described in the Royal Psalm 110:4 and confirmed in the New Testament letter to the Hebrews (Hebrews 5:6).

Wisdom Psalms. The Wisdom Psalms are concerned with issues covered in some of the other Old Testament wisdom books (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon). These issues include the problem of evil, the suffering of the righteous, and the justice of God. Some of these Psalms also highlight the importance of the Law of God. The Wisdom Psalms include 1, 37, 49, 73, 112, 119, 127, and 128. The longest Psalm in the Bible, Psalm 119, is one of the Wisdom Psalms, as is the first Psalm in the Bible, Psalm 1.

Some of the Wisdom Psalms contain a unique literary feature known as an “acrostic” arrangement. In an acrostic Psalm, the initial letter of the first word in each successive line of the Psalm has the same letter of the alphabet. For example, Psalm 119 is arranged so that each letter of the Hebrew alphabet is used through the whole Psalm. Acrostic Psalms in the Bible include the Wisdom Psalms 37, 112, and 119. (Note that other types of Psalms are arranged in the acrostic format: Hymn – Psalm 145; Lament – Psalm 25; Thanksgivings – Psalm 9,10, 34.)

Other Various Types of Psalms. There are other smaller groupings or types of Psalms in the Psalter. These Psalms usually fit into other types or categories of Psalms, too. A group of Psalms known as the *Songs of Ascent* (Psalms 120–134) was used during pilgrimages to or processions around Jerusalem or the Temple. They were called Songs of “Ascent” because a pilgrim would literally **ascend** in elevation as he went up to Jerusalem or to the Temple mount. In addition to this group, other Psalms were sung during processions: 15, 24, and 95.

Some Psalms may be called *Historical Psalms*. Historical Psalms recount God’s great works throughout the history of Israel. They include Psalms 78, 105, 106, 135, and 136.



| The Royal Psalms are also called the Messianic Psalms because they are fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

You can see that God used a great variety of Psalms to help His people pray and come to know Him better. By using and praying all of these different types of Psalms, you also may learn better how to pray and to know better the God who loves you.



Complete these statements.

- 1.46 The majority of the Psalms fit into the three main types: a. _____ ,
b. _____ , or c. _____ .
- 1.47 The _____ Psalms are those in which the king of Israel is either the speaker or the focus of attention.
- 1.48 The Psalms in Problem 1.47 above are also called _____ Psalms since they also describe a future king and “anointed one” who would be the perfect king.
- 1.49 The _____ Psalms are concerned with such issues as the problem of evil, the suffering of the righteous, the justice of God, and the Law of God.

- 1.50** The longest Psalm in the Bible is Psalm _____ .
- 1.51** In a(n) _____ Psalm, the initial letter of the first word in each successive line of the Psalm has the same letter of the alphabet.
- 1.52** The group of Psalms known as the _____ was used during pilgrimages to or processions around Jerusalem or the Temple.
- 1.53** _____ Psalms recount God's great works throughout the history of Israel.

Complete the following activity.

- 1.54** Psalm 23 is one of the best known and best loved of all the Psalms. It is a Psalm of Trust (and a Psalm of Thanksgiving). Read Psalm 23 and write in the space below the ways that David expressed his trust in the Lord in this Psalm.

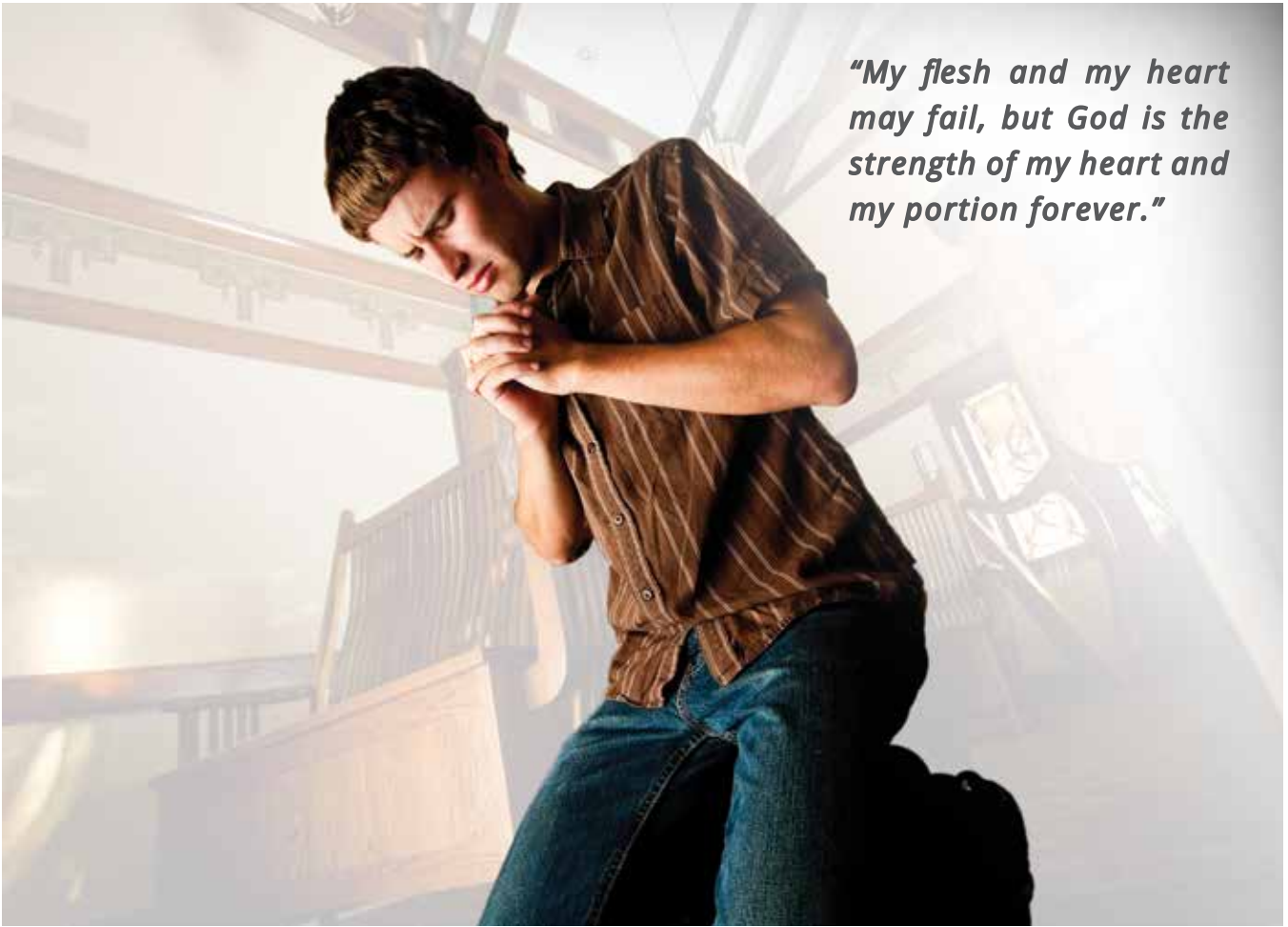
Use of the Psalms

The Psalms may be used in different ways to help us. Christians throughout the ages have found the Psalms useful for a number of purposes. In this section of the LIFE PAC, we will focus on four uses of the Psalms: theological, historical, practical, and devotional.

Theological Use. The Psalms comment on, refer to, and give instruction about almost every area of theology—the study of God and the Christian faith. The great Protestant reformer, Martin Luther, said that the Book of Psalms contained a summary of all the truth of the Old Testament.

The psalmists covered three major theological themes. First, the psalmists wrote and sang about *God's relationship to His creation*. Second, the Psalms tell about *man's relationship with God*. Third, the psalmists wrote about *Israel's relationship with God*. Each of these three theological themes is approached from God's viewpoint as well as from man's viewpoint. The psalmists often asked questions about God's relationship with His people, and God revealed the answers in the same Psalm.

Many colorful illustrations are used in the Psalms to teach important theological truths. For example, in Psalm 1:3, the Bible describes a



“My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

| Christians worship God through the Psalms.

person who is growing by reading and meditating on God’s Word: “And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”

A major theological emphasis in the Psalms is the importance of the Law of God. The Psalms reveal the value of living a good life before God. Much is said in the Psalms about the need for true righteousness. The motive and standard of this righteousness was to be the Law of God. In all 176 verses of Psalm 119, the psalmist repeatedly stated that strength comes from following God’s Law and walking in His **precepts**.

As Christians, we know that our righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ, not by

doing the works of the Law. Nevertheless, God wants us to live a moral and upright life. We can learn much about righteousness and be strengthened in it by making theological use of the Psalms and knowing the Word of God.

Historical Use. The history of Israel in the Old Testament spans over two thousand years. The Psalms speak about much of that history. The more you read and pray the Psalms, the more you will know about God’s dealings with His people. Some of the Psalms refer to events as early as the days of Abraham. Some of them speak to events regarding God’s deliverance of the Jewish people from Egypt. Many of the Psalms reveal information from the time of King David and other Kings of Israel. Other Psalms give us historical information down to

the times of Nehemiah and the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

The historical information revealed in the Psalms is more than just facts, figures, and dates. The Psalms allow us to see what men experienced, what made them sad, what made them cry out for God's mercy and help, and what made them praise Him. Reading and praying the Psalms is like looking deep into the souls of those who were part of God's chosen people. It helps us to know better the God of history and all time.

Practical Use. Another great Protestant Reformer, John Calvin, said that the Psalms would teach Christians the **anatomy** of their own souls. The Psalms provide a great source of strength for us as we see how God provided for the needs of the psalmists during times of trial and distress.

For example, when David faced the enemies of Israel, he prayed to God (Psalm 60:11), "Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man." We may not be facing armed enemies like David faced, but when we are facing difficult situations, we can also be inspired by David's example and call upon the Lord for help. When we are afraid, we can pray as David did (Psalm 23:4), "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." As we find ourselves in sin, we can make this prayer of David our own:

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me (Psalm 51:1-3).

As we see in these examples, the Psalms can be put to practical use for the situations we face in our own lives and souls.

Devotional Use. A fourth use of the Psalms involves our devotion to God and our

relationship with Him. To *devote* means to apply yourself to something with all seriousness and earnestness. Our devotion to God can be expressed in such activities as personal prayer and public worship. Since the Psalms were written as prayers to God and praises sung to God, they are primarily devotional materials. The Psalms are the primary prayer and praise book of the Jewish and Christian faiths.

Throughout the history of the Jews and Christians, the Psalms have been used in devotions and worship services. Psalm 30 was originally written and used when the house of David was dedicated to the Lord. The Jews established a system of worship within the home by reading one Psalm for every day of the week. Psalm 92 has been read on every Jewish Sabbath day for over two thousand years. Both Jewish and Christian calendars include the reading and praying of selected Psalms throughout special days and events of the year.

Jesus prayed the Psalms during His life upon earth. During the Last Supper, as the Lord celebrated the Passover Meal with His disciples, they prayed the Psalms. Jewish tradition for Passover called for the drinking of five cups of wine. The third cup was the cup of blessing and included the reading of Psalm 103, a general Hymn of Praise. The fourth cup was the cup of song and was accompanied by the reading of Psalms of Thanksgiving (115-118). The final cup of Passover was the cup of great song. This cup was partaken as Psalms 120-138 were being read. Jesus, the Word of God, knew the Psalms and prayed the Psalms for devotional use during His time on earth.

Certain Psalms are appropriate for devotional use according to the needs and certain situations. The Hebrew prayer book lists the following prayers to be read aloud in specific situations and in specific times of need:

Psalm 20, In times of illness

Psalm 23, Upon the death of a friend

Psalm 29, On the morning of worship

Psalm 100, Special times of joy
 Psalm 121, Special gatherings
 Psalm 145, Morning prayers
 Psalm 150, Upon entering the house of God
 Psalm 121, When traveling

Psalm 130, When having to wait
 Psalm 128, When moving to a new home

As you use the Psalms in your daily life, you may find some that are particularly fitting for an occasion in your own life. We should seek to use the Psalms in our daily lives as we live and worship God.



Match these items.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1.55 _____ Martin Luther</p> <p>1.56 _____ colorful illustrations</p> <p>1.57 _____ Law of God</p> <p>1.58 _____ history of Israel</p> <p>1.59 _____ John Calvin</p> <p>1.60 _____ David</p> <p>1.61 _____ devote</p> <p>1.62 _____ Psalm 92</p> <p>1.63 _____ Psalm 103</p> | <p>a. said Psalms teach Christians the anatomy of their own souls</p> <p>b. to apply yourself to something with all seriousness and earnestness</p> <p>c. read at Jesus' Last Supper</p> <p>d. discovered additional books of the Old Testament</p> <p>e. read on every Jewish Sabbath</p> <p>f. an imprecatory Psalm</p> <p>g. gave good example of calling on God's help</p> <p>h. said Psalms contained all the truth of the Old Testament</p> <p>i. major theological emphasis in the Psalms</p> <p>j. used in Psalms to teach important theological truths</p> <p>k. spans over two thousand years in Old Testament</p> |
|--|--|



Do these activities.

1.64 List four common uses of the Psalms.

- a. _____

- b. _____

- c. _____

- d. _____

1.65 List three major theological themes in the Psalms.

- a. _____

- b. _____

- c. _____

1.66 Explain how the historical information revealed in the Psalms is more than just facts, figures, and dates. _____

1.67 Choose one of the Psalms listed in the Section from the Hebrew prayer book for specific situations and needs. After writing the Psalm chosen and the situation/need in the spaces below, read the Psalm and explain why you think this Psalm was chosen for that specific need or situation.

Psalm chosen: _____

Situation/Need: _____

Explanation: _____

TEACHER CHECK

initials

date



Review the material in this section in preparation for the Self Test. The Self Test will check your mastery of this particular section. The items missed on this Self Test will indicate specific areas where restudy is needed for mastery.

SELF TEST 1

Match the following items (each answer, 2 points).

- | | | | | |
|--------------|-------|-----------|----|---|
| 1.01 | _____ | Psalm 1 | a. | the concluding doxology of the entire Psalter |
| 1.02 | _____ | Psalm 23 | b. | read at Jesus' Last Supper |
| 1.03 | _____ | Psalm 51 | c. | the shortest Psalm |
| 1.04 | _____ | Psalm 90 | d. | written during the Babylonian Exile |
| 1.05 | _____ | Psalm 92 | e. | the longest Psalm and an acrostic Psalm |
| 1.06 | _____ | Psalm 103 | f. | written by King Saul |
| 1.07 | _____ | Psalm 110 | g. | written by David after he sinned |
| 1.08 | _____ | Psalm 119 | h. | extols virtues of the Law of God |
| 1.09 | _____ | Psalm 137 | i. | one of the best known and loved Psalms |
| 1.010 | _____ | Psalm 150 | j. | read on every Jewish Sabbath |
| | | | k. | oldest Psalm |
| | | | l. | Royal (Messianic) Psalm |

Answer true or false (each answer, 2 points).

- 1.011** _____ David wrote most of the Psalms in the Psalter.
- 1.012** _____ There are other Psalms in the Old Testament outside the Book of Psalms.
- 1.013** _____ The richness of the Psalms is found in the reality of their human experience.
- 1.014** _____ The order of the Psalms follows no plan or purpose.
- 1.015** _____ Jewish scribes helped preserve the Book of Psalms through careful copying over the centuries.

Complete these statements (each answer, 2 points).

- 1.016** The Psalms are primarily _____ .
- 1.017** The church has always seen _____ throughout the Psalms.
- 1.018** The Greek word *psalmoi* referred to “ _____ to the accompaniment of stringed instruments.”
- 1.019** The earliest Psalm is attributed to _____ .
- 1.020** The majority of the Psalms fit into three main types: a. _____ , b. _____ , or c. _____ .
- 1.021** The _____ Psalms are those in which the king of Israel is either the speaker or the focus of attention.
- 1.022** The _____ Psalms are concerned with such issues as the problem of evil, the suffering of the righteous, the justice of God, and the law of God.
- 1.023** The group of Psalms known as the _____ was used during pilgrimages to or processions around Jerusalem or the Temple.

Match the following items (each answer, 2 points).

- | | |
|---|------------------|
| 1.024 _____ the true author of the Psalms | a. Solomon |
| 1.025 _____ seventy-three Psalms attributed to him | b. chief scribe |
| 1.026 _____ said that the Psalms contained all the truth of the Old Testament | c. God |
| 1.027 _____ said that the Psalms teach Christians the anatomy of their own souls | d. Nehemiah |
| 1.028 _____ some Psalms were written during his lifetime after the exile | e. John Calvin |
| | f. David |
| | g. Martin Luther |

Write the letter of the correct answer in the blank (each answer, 2 points).

- 1.029** The 150 Psalms of the Psalter were written over a period of _____ years.
a. a hundred b. five hundred c. seven hundred d. a thousand
- 1.030** The stages of formation of the Psalter may be compared to the formation process of a(n) _____ .
a. mountain b. river c. iceberg d. landslide
- 1.031** The second stage in the formation of the Psalter was the formation of _____ .
a. a group of men to write more Psalms
b. individual songs into special groups used for public worship
c. new Psalms by David's son, Solomon
d. the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem
- 1.032** The final assembly of the Psalter was probably accomplished by _____ .
a. David and his soldiers
b. the succeeding kings of Judah over many years
c. a small group of men or even by one man
d. the early Christians as they began to worship
- 1.033** The Greek translation of the Old Testament made about 250 BC, in Alexandria, became known as the _____ .
a. standard text of the Bible b. Septuagint
c. Vulgate d. orthodox Bible

Complete the following lists (each lettered item, 2, points).

- 1.034** List three characteristics of the Psalms that help answer the question:
"What are the Psalms?"

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

1.035 List the three sub-categories of Hymn Psalms.

- a. _____
 b. _____
 c. _____

1.036 List four common uses of the Psalms.

- a. _____
 b. _____
 c. _____
 d. _____

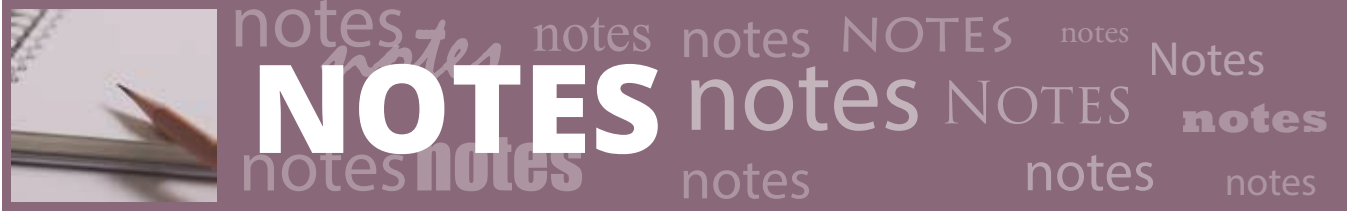
Answer the following questions (each answer, 5 points).

1.037 What are some ways that Christians preserved the Psalms? _____

1.038 What is meant by a "Lament" Psalm? _____

80
100

SCORE _____ **TEACHER** _____
 initials date





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