

GROUNDS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Experiencing the Psalms” Observations. (1 Chronicles 16:1-36). For lesson copies, go to <http://www.montgomerychurch.org/resources8.html>

Primary resources: James L. Mays, *Psalms*, 1994, John Knox Press; *Shepherd's Notes on the Psalms*, 1999, Broadman & Holman Publishers; *Life Application Study Bible*, NIV, 1991, Tyndale House Publishers and Zondervan Publishing House.

Compilation of the Psalms: Scholars believe that the Psalms were written over a period of roughly 400 years. They are divided into 5 sections or books marked by a closing doxology by different compilers. The first 3 books are thought to be the Psalter of the Jews in exile. *Book one* includes Psalms 1-41 with the doxology shown in 41:13. David, who died around 970 B.C., is thought to be the primary compiler. *Book two*, compiled perhaps by David or Solomon, includes Psalms 42-72 with the doxology in 72:18-20. *Book three*, Psalms 73-89 with doxology in 89:52, may have been compiled by unnamed Korahites (temple singers – 2 Chronicles 20:19). It includes Psalms from Asaph, probably after 586 B.C. *Book four* (Psalms 90-106 with doxology in 106:48) and *book five* (Psalms 107-150) may be post-exile after 537 B.C. Some Psalms appear in more than one collection, e.g., in book one, Psalm 14 is the same as Psalm 58 in book two. Also in book one, part of Psalm 40 is the same as Psalm 70 in book two. The latter halves of Psalms 57 and 60 in book two are the same as Psalm 108 in book five. Thus, it would appear that each book was compiled independently.

Major themes include: God's works in creation, judgment, salvation; Israel's story; the law of life; the Holy city and the divine presence there; the once and future Davidic messiah; warning against wickedness and exhortation to righteousness; the majesty and tragedy of the human condition; the everlasting, present, and coming Kingdom of God. In future lessons, the full range of human emotions are explored: joy, despair, guilt, consolation, love, hate, thankfulness, and dissatisfaction. *As such, the Psalms remind us that all of life is under God's Lordship.* In addition, James Mays notes that “the Psalms and its prophetic companion, Isaiah, are the two Old Testament books most quoted in the New Testament” (p. 2). They are especially crucial in helping to identify Jesus Christ. Quotes from Psalm 2, for example, help frame God's identification of Jesus as His “son” at Jesus' baptism. In Peter's sermon, Christ is the “Anointed One” drawn specifically from Psalm 2:1-2 (Acts 4: 25).

Observations about the Psalms:

- Does God exist? Interestingly, this question is not posed in the Psalms. The psalmist always presupposes the existence of the sovereign God of Israel. The Psalmist may cry: “Where is God?” But he will not wonder about the existence of God. Think about what you might write if you have no belief in God. For example, when David – a man after God's own heart – pens: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...” (Ps 23), an atheist might state: “I am a sheep without a shepherd, I don't know who to follow and I am utterly in want...”. Your communication reflects your understanding of God. In this study, we too will presuppose God's existence, but we will try to present the total majesty of God seen by the Psalmists in the hope of broadening our own perspectives.
- What does the existence of God mean to me? This is really the critical question framed by the psalmist. And this is the question that needs to be internalized as the Word of God through the psalmist speaks to us. David's answer is clear: God saves, creates, judges, and is totally faithful to those who “seek His face always” (1 Chronicles 16:11).
- What is God like? While this question is peripherally addressed by the psalmist, it still is not a main issue. Assumption of the Sovereign God presupposes His Power, Presence, and His Character. In God's case, this includes righteous judgment, mercy, and love.
- What can I become by attaching myself to God? Here, once again, we meet the searching question. The psalmist speaks to this question in a myriad of ways. As we go through the study, my prayer is that a clear picture of the character and majesty of God will shine through so that we can all answer this question with the assurance anticipated in the Word of God.