

**Introducing
the Psalms
1-2**

- *Blessedness both personal and international*

The best introduction to the psalms is the psalms! Let us look at these psalms in the sequence in which they come to us. One of the things we shall discover as we work through the Book of Psalms is that this great book is well-edited! For example, the first two psalms form a general introduction to the entire book. **Psalm 1** focuses on personal 'blessedness' and the way to find it. **Psalm 2** speaks of the nations but also ends with the same promise of blessedness. The two psalms together begin and end with the same thought [☞]¹; they introduce us to blessedness, personal and international.

☞¹ 1:1; 2:12**David and
Absalom
3-8**

- *Psalms of David's troubles*
- *Enemies*
- *The discipline of prayer*
- *Handling guilt*
- *A clear conscience*
- *No place to rest*

Psalms 3-9, 11-32, 34-41 all claim to be in David's psalm-collection. Since Psalm 10 is attached to Psalm 9 it must also be included in the same collection. Only Psalm 33 has no conspicuous link with David. The theme of the collection as a whole is that of the crises of David's life. They are 'psalms of David's troubles'. Psalms 3-8 are the first group. The title of **Psalm 3** links it with the crisis that took place through Absalom's rebellion. Quite possibly the heading is meant to extend as far as Psalm 6. The opening line ('How many are my foes!') sets the tone for this part of the Psalms. **Psalm 4** relates to the same situation and tells us how David addressed his friends and his enemies at such a time. **Psalm 5** tells how he disciplined himself to pray about such problems. **Psalm 6** tells us how he handled guilt, for some of the crisis with Absalom was indeed his own fault. Yet **Psalm 7** has a new heading and deals with the opposite case, for in the situation referred to, David wanted to keep his conscience clear. **Psalm 8** is the closing psalm in a group that began in Psalm 3. It has the same themes. In Psalms 3-7 David prays late at night [☞]¹ and early in the day [☞]² for God's help. In Psalm 8 he is still out in the night-time, still with no place to rest except the countryside, still facing 'the enemy and the avenger'. We have in Psalms 3-7 a context for the last in the group.

☞¹ 3:5; 4:4, 8; 6:6☞² see Psalm 6:3**Problems
and Answers
9-19**

- *Hopes for the abolition of evil*
- *Triumph comes slowly*
- *God refusers*
- *God seekers*
- *Rejoicing in the face of death*

The next group is Psalms 9-19. Psalms 9-14 focuses on problems; Psalms 15-19 focuses on answers. The group of psalms begins with a double-psalm (**Psalms 9-10**), loosely based on the alphabet. It rejoices in the certainty that sin will be wiped out of existence sooner or later! After some hopes for the abolition of evil (Psalms 9-10), the next psalm says such triumph might be slow in coming. In David's time there were occasions when the foundations of society were in ruins, but David was not convinced anyone should run away (**Psalm 11**). **Psalm 12** also makes the point that 'the faithful have vanished' and society is full of deceitful slanderous talk. **Psalm 13** refers to delay (How long will it be?). **Psalm 14** considers those people who do not want God in their lives, and who say 'No God!' **Psalm 15** moves from practical atheism to its opposite. There are some who want fellowship with God, and the psalm asks how such fellowship may be found ('Yahweh, who will dwell in your tent?').

Psalm 16 brings before us someone whose love of God keeps him rejoicing even in the face of death. **Psalm 17** is exclusively concerned with how to pray.

• *Hearing God's voice*

Battles and Encouragements 20-33

- *Conflicts*
- *An execution that affects 'all the ends of the earth'*
- *Shepherd and King of Glory*
- *God's house – the worship centre in David's days*
- *Strength for the godly*
- *David's failures and God's answer*
- *The basis of our optimism – God's power in creation and His love*

In **Psalm 18** we see how David was brought through to be the 'head of the nations' despite all the opposition that he faced. **Psalm 19** explains how the voice of God is to be heard.

Psalms 20-33 is the next section in Book 1 of the psalms. The groups of psalms so far have begun with pairs of psalms (1-2, 3-4, 9-10), and **Psalms 20-21** follow the same pattern. Possibly there is a trend of thought in Psalms 20-24. They tell of prayer before a battle and thanksgiving after it. Similar wording links the two. 'May God grant you your heart's desire' is the prayer of Psalm 20:4. 'You have given him his heart's desire', says Psalm 21:2. The conflicts of Psalms 20-21 lead into an even greater conflict in **Psalm 22**, where we have a song about an execution that affects 'all the ends of the earth' ¹. But it is followed by a striking contrast in which the psalm portrays God as shepherd (**Psalm 23**). Who can approach such a great and mighty God? **Psalm 24** asks the question and answers it. The King of glory leads us in to the presence of God.

¹ 22:27

There are connections in the group of psalms that runs from Psalm 25 to Psalm 29. Psalm 25 is an alphabetic psalm whose themes are connected with prayer and guidance. Psalms 26-28 are concerned with some life-threatening crisis in David's life. Each mentions God's house, the worship centre of the days of David. **Psalm 25** prays for rescue in a day of trouble; **Psalm 26** has revealed a model of the faith that is involved. This all carries us forward into **Psalm 27** (a classic song of a man who is living for God) and **Psalm 28** (written in the same situation, and dealing with avoiding the sinner's judgement) and on into **Psalm 29** (revealing the source of strength for the godly person). Psalm 29 belongs to the same group for a final thought in Psalm 28 is followed up in Psalm 29 ¹. The storm of the psalm pictures the strength of God.

¹ compare 28:8 and 29:11

Different kinds of failure are mentioned in Psalms 30-32, to which Psalm 33 is an answer. In **Psalm 30** David confesses to over-confidence at a time when his own house (not the temple!) was being built but it is also a song of thanksgiving for the time when God rescued him. Even when we fail our mourning may be turned to dancing. In times of great stress prayer is the answer (**Psalm 31**). When we fail, we find forgiveness in God (**Psalm 32**). The next psalm (**Psalm 33**) makes the point that God's power in creation is a sample of God's love and forms the basis of our optimism.



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