

Psalms Fall, 2015

Tehillim – Hebrew title for the Psalm. The Hebrew word means praises, or songs of praise. Some of the psalms, however, are not praise songs, but songs that may question God.

The English title of Psalms comes from the Greek title ψαλμοι.

Psalms consist of 150 religious poems which were not compiled in a whole set until just a couple of hundred years before Jesus. The Psalms have a characteristic unlike any other book of the OT.

Some books of the OT can be described as words written for humans – wisdom, history.

Some books of the OT can be described as words of God for people – prophetic writings.

The Psalms, however, have the distinction that, to a degree unlike any other part of the Bible, they contain the words of humans written to God.

As a result, we find that the emotions of the ancient Jew, the questions of the ancient Jew, and the joys of the ancient Jew, are similar to those of modern Christians.

Author

King David is traditionally called the author of the Psalms. He did write many of them, but not all of them. Because he was a famous Psalmist, and the first Jewish Psalmist of note, all the Psalms are ascribed to him.

A fair number of the Psalms, however, were written well after the death of king David. Some as late as 400 – 200 B.C.

Music

Contrary to what many Christians believe, music – singing – dancing – were a major part of the worship of ancient Jews, and even Jesus himself. This is certainly reflected in the book of Psalms.

A number of musical instruments are mentioned in Psalms.

1. **Wind instruments:** trumpets, flutes

Psalm 5

For the choir director: A psalm of David, to be accompanied by the flute.

and even organs, which were reed pipes (**Psalm 150**).

2. **Stringed instruments:**
Psalm 33:3 – Sing a new song of praise to him;
play skillfully on the harp, and sing with joy.

lyre, harps

Psalm 150:1 – Praise the LORD!

- Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty heaven!
- ² Praise him for his mighty works;
praise his unequalled greatness!
 - ³ Praise him with a blast of the ram's horn;
praise him with the lyre and harp!
 - ⁴ Praise him with the tambourine and dancing;
praise him with strings and flutes!
 - ⁵ Praise him with a clash of cymbals;
praise him with loud clanging cymbals.
 - ⁶ Let everything that breathes sing praises to the LORD!

Praise the LORD!

& even a zither, which was an instrument with 3 to 6 strings and was struck with a hammer.

3. Percussion instruments: **(150:5)** loud clashing cymbals, high sounding cymbals, sounding cymbals, tinkling cymbals. Also a timbrel **(149:3, 150:4)**, which was a small flat drum used for religious dances – we translate this instrument as a tambourine.

There is a word we find quite often in the Book of Psalms, and usually it is not translated into anything other than the Hebrew of the word.

Selah –

Psalm 3:1 – LORD, how they have increased who trouble me!

Many *are* they who rise up against me.

² Many *are* they who say of me,
“*There is no help for him in God.*” Selah

³ But You, O LORD, *are* a shield for me,
My glory and the One who lifts up my head.

⁴ I cried to the LORD with my voice,
And He heard me from His holy hill. Selah

⁵ I lay down and slept;
I awoke, for the LORD sustained me.

⁶ I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people
Who have set *themselves* against me all around.

⁷ Arise, O LORD;
Save me, O my God!
For You have struck all my enemies on the cheekbone;
You have broken the teeth of the ungodly.

⁸ Salvation *belongs* to the LORD.
Your blessing *is* upon Your people. Selah

The word is used 70 times in the Psalms, and 3 times elsewhere in the OT. It literally means, ‘lift up’. It is most likely a musical term or direction, but its exact significance is not known.

8 Types of Psalms

1. **Hymns of praise:** were intended to praise God and were meant for the choral parts of temple ceremonies.

Psalm 40:1 – I waited patiently for the LORD;

he turned to me and heard my cry.

² He lifted me out of the slimy pit,
out of the mud and mire;

he set my feet on a rock
and gave me a firm place to stand.

³ He put a new song in my mouth,
a hymn of praise to our God.

Many will see and fear the LORD
and put their trust in him.

⁴ Blessed is the one
who trusts in the LORD,
who does not look to the proud,
to those who turn aside to false gods.^[b]

⁵ Many, LORD my God,
are the wonders you have done,
the things you planned for us.

None can compare with you;
were I to speak and tell of your deeds,
they would be too many to declare.

Then to V. 14 –

May all who want to take my life
be put to shame and confusion;
may all who desire my ruin
be turned back in disgrace.

¹⁵ May those who say to me, “Aha! Aha!”
be appalled at their own shame.

¹⁶ But may all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who long for your saving help always say,
“The LORD is great!”

¹⁷ But as for me, I am poor and needy;
may the Lord think of me.

You are my help and my deliverer;
you are my God, do not delay.

2. **Community Laments:** arose out of national calamities, presented the cause of the nation to God, and asked for God to intervene.

Psalm 79:1 – O God, the nations have invaded your inheritance;
 they have defiled your holy temple,
 they have reduced Jerusalem to rubble.
²They have left the dead bodies of your servants
 as food for the birds of the sky,
 the flesh of your own people for the animals of the wild.
³They have poured out blood like water
 all around Jerusalem,
 and there is no one to bury the dead.
⁴We are objects of contempt to our neighbors,
 of scorn and derision to those around us.
⁵How long, LORD? Will you be angry forever?
 How long will your jealousy burn like fire?
⁶Pour out your wrath on the nations
 that do not acknowledge you,
 on the kingdoms
 that do not call on your name;
⁷for they have devoured Jacob
 and devastated his homeland.

3. **Royal Psalms:** concerned with a reigning Hebrew king, these include the oldest of the psalms, dating prior to 587 BC – which is when the united Jewish kingdom dissolved.

Psalm 2 – Why do the nations conspire
 and the peoples plot in vain?
²The kings of the earth rise up
 and the rulers band together
 against the LORD and against his anointed, saying,
³“Let us break their chains
 and throw off their shackles.”
⁴The One enthroned in heaven laughs;
 the Lord scoffs at them.
⁵He rebukes them in his anger
 and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,
⁶“I have installed my king
 on Zion, my holy mountain. ”
⁷I will proclaim the LORD’s decree:
 He said to me, “You are my son;
 today I have become your father.
⁸Ask me,

and I will make the nations your inheritance,
 the ends of the earth your possession.
⁹ You will break them with a rod of iron^[b];
 you will dash them to pieces like pottery. ”
¹⁰ Therefore, you kings, be wise;
 be warned, you rulers of the earth.
¹¹ Serve the LORD with fear
 and celebrate his rule with trembling.
¹² Kiss his son, or he will be angry
 and your way will lead to your destruction,
 for his wrath can flare up in a moment.
 Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

4. **Individual Laments:** are the most common type of Psalm. Such Psalms are the cries of an individual to God for help from various circumstances.

Psalm 3 – LORD, how many are my foes!
 How many rise up against me!
² Many are saying of me,
 “God will not deliver him. ”
³ But you, LORD, are a shield around me,
 my glory, the One who lifts my head high.
⁴ I call out to the LORD,
 and he answers me from his holy mountain.
⁵ I lie down and sleep;
 I wake again, because the LORD sustains me.
⁶ I will not fear though tens of thousands
 assail me on every side.
⁷ Arise, LORD!
 Deliver me, my God!
 Strike all my enemies on the jaw;
 break the teeth of the wicked.
⁸ From the LORD comes deliverance.
 May your blessing be on your people.

- **NOTE:** Some laments invoke God to act against the enemy. (**Psalm 35**).

5. **Individual Songs of Thanksgiving:** individual expressions of gratitude to God for mercies received. Most are connected with temple ceremonies.

Psalm 32: 1 – Blessed is the one
 whose transgressions are forgiven,
 whose sins are covered.

² Blessed is the one
 whose sin the LORD does not count against them
 and in whose spirit is no deceit.

³ When I kept silent,
 my bones wasted away
 through my groaning all day long.

⁴ For day and night
 your hand was heavy on me;
 my strength was sapped
 as in the heat of summer.^[b]

⁵ Then I acknowledged my sin to you
 and did not cover up my iniquity.
 I said, “I will confess
 my transgressions to the LORD.”
 And you forgave
 the guilt of my sin.

⁶ Therefore let all the faithful pray to you
 while you may be found;
 surely the rising of the mighty waters
 will not reach them.

⁷ You are my hiding place;
 you will protect me from trouble
 and surround me with songs of deliverance.

⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
 I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.

⁹ Do not be like the horse or the mule,
 which have no understanding
 but must be controlled by bit and bridle
 or they will not come to you.

¹⁰ Many are the woes of the wicked,
 but the LORD’s unfailing love
 surrounds the one who trusts in him.

¹¹ Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous;
 sing, all you who are upright in heart!

6. Enthronement Psalms: Hymns that celebrate Yahweh’s enthronement as king of the universe.

Psalm 47:1 – Clap your hands, all you nations;
 shout to God with cries of joy.
²For the LORD Most High is awesome,
 the great King over all the earth.
³He subdued nations under us,
 peoples under our feet.
⁴He chose our inheritance for us,
 the pride of Jacob, whom he loved.^[b]
⁵God has ascended amid shouts of joy,
 the LORD amid the sounding of trumpets.
⁶Sing praises to God, sing praises;
 sing praises to our King, sing praises.
⁷For God is the King of all the earth;
 sing to him a psalm of praise.
⁸God reigns over the nations;
 God is seated on his holy throne.
⁹The nobles of the nations assemble
 as the people of the God of Abraham,
 for the kings^[c] of the earth belong to God;
 he is greatly exalted.

7. Wisdom Poetry:

Psalm 49:1 – Hear this, all you peoples;
 listen, all who live in this world,
²both low and high,
 rich and poor alike:
³My mouth will speak words of wisdom;
 the meditation of my heart will give you understanding.
⁴I will turn my ear to a proverb;
 with the harp I will expound my riddle:
⁵Why should I fear when evil days come,
 when wicked deceivers surround me—
⁶those who trust in their wealth
 and boast of their great riches?
⁷No one can redeem the life of another
 or give to God a ransom for them—
⁸the ransom for a life is costly,
 no payment is ever enough—

- ⁹ so that they should live on forever
and not see decay.
- ¹⁰ For all can see that the wise die,
that the foolish and the senseless also perish,
leaving their wealth to others.
- ¹¹ Their tombs will remain their houses^[b] forever,
their dwellings for endless generations,
though they had^[c] named lands after themselves.
- ¹² People, despite their wealth, do not endure;
they are like the beasts that perish.
- ¹³ This is the fate of those who trust in themselves,
and of their followers, who approve their sayings.^[d]
- ¹⁴ They are like sheep and are destined to die;
death will be their shepherd
(but the upright will prevail over them in the morning).
Their forms will decay in the grave,
far from their princely mansions.
- ¹⁵ But God will redeem me from the realm of the dead;
he will surely take me to himself.
- ¹⁶ Do not be overawed when others grow rich,
when the splendor of their houses increases;
- ¹⁷ for they will take nothing with them when they die,
their splendor will not descend with them.
- ¹⁸ Though while they live they count themselves blessed—
and people praise you when you prosper—
- ¹⁹ they will join those who have gone before them,
who will never again see the light of life.
- ²⁰ People who have wealth but lack understanding
are like the beasts that perish.

8. Liturgies: worship liturgies used by different tribes.

Psalm 42:1 – As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God.

² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

When can I go and meet with God?

³ My tears have been my food
day and night,

while people say to me all day long,

“Where is your God?”

⁴ These things I remember

as I pour out my soul:
 how I used to go to the house of God
 under the protection of the Mighty One^d
 with shouts of joy and praise
 among the festive throng.
⁵ Why, my soul, are you downcast?
 Why so disturbed within me?
 Put your hope in God,
 for I will yet praise him,
 my Savior and my God.
⁶ My soul is downcast within me;
 therefore I will remember you
 from the land of the Jordan,
 the heights of Hermon —from Mount Mizar.
⁷ Deep calls to deep
 in the roar of your waterfalls;
 all your waves and breakers
 have swept over me.
⁸ By day the LORD directs his love,
 at night his song is with me—
 a prayer to the God of my life.
⁹ I say to God my Rock,
 “Why have you forgotten me?
 Why must I go about mourning,
 oppressed by the enemy?”
¹⁰ My bones suffer mortal agony
 as my foes taunt me,
 saying to me all day long,
 “Where is your God?”
¹¹ Why, my soul, are you downcast?
 Why so disturbed within me?
 Put your hope in God,
 for I will yet praise him,
 my Savior and my God.

Poetry

Jewish poetry is much different from our poetry. There are several different types of Jewish poetry, I’ll just cover two.

1. **Parallelism:** When the second line is closely related to the second.
- 2.

Psalm 49:1 – Hear this, all you peoples;
listen, all who live in this world,

Acrostic: Each new sentence or line begins with the next letter of the alphabet. Of course, we don't notice it because it only works in Hebrew! (Psalm 111, 112, 119). These Psalms are not Psalms of David, for acrostic poetry was a literary fad which came long after David.

Theology

1. **God:** By the time we get to Psalms the Jews have entered into a monotheistic religion. The more ancient Jews recognized other Gods, but understood Yahweh as the top God.

- It is true that one or two Psalms mention 'gods', but this is usually interpreted as members of the heavenly court.

- Some Psalms have God enthroned in heaven
Psalm 53:2 – God looks down from heaven on all mankind

- Some Psalms have God in Zion, or in the land with the Jews
Psalm 132:13-14 – For the LORD has chosen Zion,
he has desired it for his dwelling, saying,
¹⁴“This is my resting place for ever and ever;
here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it.

- By the time we get to the last of the Psalms written, it is generally understood by the Jews that God is Spirit, and that God is everywhere

Psalm 139:7-12 – Where can I go from your Spirit?

Where can I flee from your presence?

⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there;

if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn,

if I settle on the far side of the sea,

¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me,

your right hand will hold me fast.

¹¹ If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,”
¹² even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

- The characteristics of God in the Psalms are righteousness, justice, mercy & faithfulness.
- God expects the leaders of the people to embody these same characteristics.
- More important for we as Christians, the Psalms state the Jewish belief that God is gracious & forgiving

Psalm 65:1 – Praise awaits you, our God, in Zion;
to you our vows will be fulfilled.
² You who answer prayer,
to you all people will come.
³ When we were overwhelmed by sins,
you forgave our transgressions.

- Life’s ultimate joy comes from living in communion with God
Psalm 16:11 – you make known to me the path of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence,
with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

2. **The World:** God controls every aspect of the world.

- Have a lot of usage of the forces of nature – God uses nature to reveal himself.

Psalm 18:7-15 – The earth trembled and quaked,
and the foundations of the mountains shook;
they trembled because he was angry.
⁸ Smoke rose from his nostrils;

consuming fire came from his mouth,
 burning coals blazed out of it.
⁹ He parted the heavens and came down;
 dark clouds were under his feet.
¹⁰ He mounted the cherubim and flew;
 he soared on the wings of the wind.
¹¹ He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him—
 the dark rain clouds of the sky.
¹² Out of the brightness of his presence clouds advanced,
 with hailstones and bolts of lightning.
¹³ The LORD thundered from heaven;
 the voice of the Most High resounded.^[d]
¹⁴ He shot his arrows and scattered the enemy,
 with great bolts of lightning he routed them.
¹⁵ The valleys of the sea were exposed
 and the foundations of the earth laid bare
 at your rebuke, LORD,
 at the blast of breath from your nostrils.

3. **Humans:** According to the theology of Psalms, humans are the pinnacle of God's creation & the master of the earth.

Psalm 8:3 – When I consider your heavens,
 the work of your fingers,
 the moon and the stars,
 which you have set in place,
⁴ what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
 human beings that you care for them?^[c]
⁵ You have made them^[d] a little lower than the angels^[e]
 and crowned them^[f] with glory and honor.
⁶ You made them rulers over the works of your hands;
 you put everything under their^[g] feet:
⁷ all flocks and herds,
 and the animals of the wild,
⁸ the birds in the sky,
 and the fish in the sea,
 all that swim the paths of the seas.

- Yet at the same time the Psalmist is surprised that God even pays attention to humans. (**Psalm 8:3**).
- Psalms recognizes our total dependence upon God. However! – God has some requirements of us, and these are basically moral requirements.

Psalm 15:1 – LORD, who may dwell in your sacred tent?

Who may live on your holy mountain?

²The one whose walk is blameless,

who does what is righteous,

who speaks the truth from their heart;

³whose tongue utters no slander,

who does no wrong to a neighbor,

and casts no slur on others;

⁴who despises a vile person

but honors those who fear the LORD;

who keeps an oath even when it hurts,

and does not change their mind;

⁵who lends money to the poor without interest;

who does not accept a bribe against the innocent.

Whoever does these things

will never be shaken.

What about death? People die and that's about it. The Spirit goes to Sheol, but God doesn't really concern himself with folks in Sheol.

Psalms 88:3 – I am overwhelmed with troubles

and my life draws near to death.

⁴I am counted among those who go down to the pit;

I am like one without strength.

⁵I am set apart with the dead,

like the slain who lie in the grave,

whom you remember no more,

who are cut off from your care.

⁶You have put me in the lowest pit,

in the darkest depths.

⁷ Your wrath lies heavily on me;
 you have overwhelmed me with all your waves.^[d]
⁸ You have taken from me my closest friends
 and have made me repulsive to them.
 I am confined and cannot escape;
⁹ my eyes are dim with grief.

I call to you, LORD, every day;
 I spread out my hands to you.
¹⁰ Do you show your wonders to the dead?
 Do their spirits rise up and praise you?
¹¹ Is your love declared in the grave,
 your faithfulness in Destruction^[e]?
¹² Are your wonders known in the place of darkness,
 or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?

- In some of the last Psalms written, there is an emerging hope for God's presence after death.

Psalm 49:15 – But God will redeem me from the realm of the dead;
 he will surely take me to himself.

Psalm 73:23 – Yet I am always with you;
 you hold me by my right hand.
²⁴ You guide me with your counsel,
 and afterward you will take me into glory.
²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you?
 And earth has nothing I desire besides you.
²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail,
 but God is the strength of my heart
 and my portion forever.

- 4. The People of God:** The Psalms, like the rest of the OT, certainly reflect the Jewish idea that God had chosen them for a purpose – the purpose of telling the world about God.

Psalm 73:28 – But as for me, it is good to be near God.

I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge;
I will tell of all your deeds.

Psalm 96:1 – Sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.

² Sing to the LORD, praise his name;
proclaim his salvation day after day.

³ Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous deeds among all peoples.

5. **Other Nations:** While some Psalms do speak of the Gentiles being subordinate to the Jews, most are more universalistic.

Psalm 47:7 – For God is the King of all the earth;
sing to him a psalm of praise.

⁸ God reigns over the nations;
God is seated on his holy throne.

6. **Eschatology:** Basically, the Psalms concern themselves with the problems of the present time. They are not prophetic, nor do they look to the distant future.

Hymns of Praise

The last time we met we looked at the Wisdom Psalms.
Tonight we will take a look at Hymns of praise – which is what most people think of when they think of the Psalms.

The psalms that we classify as hymns of praise were primarily written to be used for the choral part of temple ceremonies.

Hymns of praise will have three defining characteristics:

1. A Call to Praise God
2. The Reason for Praising God
3. A Renewed Call to Praise God.

Let's begin with one of my favorite hymns –

Psalm 8:1 – LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth! (Call to Praise)

(Now we have the reason to Praise God)

You have set your glory
in the heavens.

²Through the praise of children and infants
you have established a stronghold against your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.

³When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,

which you have set in place,

⁴what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?^[c]

⁵You have made them^[d] a little lower than the angels^[e]
and crowned them^[f] with glory and honor.

⁶You made them rulers over the works of your hands;
you put everything under their^[g] feet:

⁷all flocks and herds,
and the animals of the wild,

⁸the birds in the sky,
and the fish in the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.

(Now a renewed call to praise God)

⁹LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth! (NIV)

You may note that in your Bible the heading above this Psalm says: For the director of music. According to gittith.

According to the gittith referred to a musical style.

The gittith may be derived from the word for winepress, and signify joy.

The three psalms that are designated ‘according to the gittith’ are joyful psalms (8, 81, & 84).

One of the main points of this psalm is the recognition of our place in creation. Verse 5 tells us that humans are just a little lower than the angels – some translation may have God or gods, but the Hebrew word reflected the beings of God’s heavenly court.

Verse six tells us what we were told in the creation story – that we have a responsibility for God’s creation. We should praise God for this – and ask God for wisdom & discernment in having all things of this world under our feet.

One commentary I read said that this tells us that we are appointed as God’s deputy in this world. This is what we were created for – and what we lost in Eden, but yet should still seek to do.

Whatever one believes about evolution – for it or against it – this psalm makes it clear that we were created for a purpose, and we should praise God for this.

Psalm 19

The next Hymn we will look at is Psalm 19, and the first six verses sound very similar to Psalm 8.

Psalm 19:1 – The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

² Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.

³ They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.

⁴ Yet their voice^[b] goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.

In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.

⁵ It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.

⁶ It rises at one end of the heavens
and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is deprived of its warmth.

All creation sings – heavens declare the glory of God.
Creation is already praising God, and we should join in.

Some would/do criticize such psalms as being ignorant of how the universe works.
The sun does not go around the world, but the world around the sun.
Such criticism is not necessary – the point is not how the universe works – but that
the universe works and it's God that causes the universe to work.

Because God orders creation – we are called to praise God.

In verse 7 the focus switches from God ordering creation to once again – like
Psalm 8 – our role in the created order.

Verse 7 – The law of the LORD is perfect,
refreshing the soul.

The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.

⁸ The precepts of the LORD are right,
giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the LORD are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.

⁹ The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever.

The decrees of the LORD are firm,
and all of them are righteous.

¹⁰ They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;

they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the honeycomb.

As the creation stories in Genesis taught us, we are created to live in a relationship
with God.

We maintain this relationship by observing God's law, statutes, precepts
(teachings), commands, and by living with reverence towards God (fear).

When we live out this relationship in the manner in which we were created to live it out – we will have a refreshed soul (abundant life), joy in our heart, and light for our eyes.

The Psalm ends with a prayer and a call for a blameless life.

VV. 11 – By them your servant is warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.

¹² But who can discern their own errors?
Forgive my hidden faults.

¹³ Keep your servant also from willful sins;
may they not rule over me.

Then I will be blameless,
innocent of great transgression.

¹⁴ May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight,
LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Verse 13 asks God to keep us from willful sins. Other translations have presumptuous sins. The meaning is the same.

The psalmist recognizes the abundant life that living in relationship will bring, but also recognizes how difficult it is for fallen humans.

Our next Hymn Psalm is Psalm 29.

You will note some similarities of Psalm 29 with Psalm 8 & 19 – God is very much displayed in nature.

Characteristic of Hymn Psalm, Psalm 29 begins with a call to praise.

Psalm 29:1 – Ascribe to the LORD, you heavenly beings,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

² Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
worship the LORD in the splendor of his^[a] holiness.

The heavenly beings are the same things referred to in Psalm 8 – we were made just a little lower than these.

The word we translate as glory in verses 1 & 2 – as well as verse 9 – literally means abundance. God is the God of abundance. It's a good word to think of when we think of God.

We seek abundance in this world, but true abundance – and true glory – is found in God.

John 10:10.

Next we have the Storm –

VV. 3 – The voice of the LORD is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the LORD thunders over the mighty waters.

⁴The voice of the LORD is powerful;
the voice of the LORD is majestic.

⁵The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;
the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.

⁶He makes Lebanon leap like a calf,
Sirion like a young wild ox.

⁷The voice of the LORD strikes
with flashes of lightning.

⁸The voice of the LORD shakes the desert;
the LORD shakes the Desert of Kadesh.

⁹The voice of the LORD twists the oaks^[c]
and strips the forests bare.

And in his temple all cry, “Glory!”

¹⁰The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;
the LORD is enthroned as King forever.

¹¹The LORD gives strength to his people;
the LORD blesses his people with peace.

The display of God in nature was truly awe inspiring to these ancient people.
And – it should be to us, today.

In some ways, modern people have lost their appreciation for the natural beauty of the world.

Next we go to Psalm 33.

This hymn is not only choral hymn, but liturgical – the choir would sing part, and the people would respond back in song.

We have these in our UMH, but most UMC do not use them any longer.

We see the three characteristics of a hymn clearly displayed in Psalm 33.

A Call to praise God:

- VV. 1 – Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous;
 it is fitting for the upright to praise him.
² Praise the LORD with the harp;
 make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre.
³ Sing to him a new song;
 play skillfully, and shout for joy.

Then we have reasons to praise:

- VV. 4 – For the word of the LORD is right and true;
 he is faithful in all he does.
⁵ The LORD loves righteousness and justice;
 the earth is full of his unfailing love.
⁶ By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
 their starry host by the breath of his mouth.
⁷ He gathers the waters of the sea into jars^[a];
 he puts the deep into storehouses.
⁸ Let all the earth fear the LORD;
 let all the people of the world revere him.
⁹ For he spoke, and it came to be;
 he commanded, and it stood firm.
¹⁰ The LORD foils the plans of the nations;
 he thwarts the purposes of the peoples.
¹¹ But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever,
 the purposes of his heart through all generations.
¹² Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,
 the people he chose for his inheritance.
¹³ From heaven the LORD looks down
 and sees all mankind;
¹⁴ from his dwelling place he watches

all who live on earth—
¹⁵ he who forms the hearts of all,
 who considers everything they do.
¹⁶ No king is saved by the size of his army;
 no warrior escapes by his great strength.
¹⁷ A horse is a vain hope for deliverance;
 despite all its great strength it cannot save.
¹⁸ But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him,
 on those whose hope is in his unfailing love,
¹⁹ to deliver them from death
 and keep them alive in famine.

It ends with a renewed call to praise – which was often a statement of trust as we see here.

VV. 20 – We wait in hope for the LORD;
 he is our help and our shield.
²¹ In him our hearts rejoice,
 for we trust in his holy name.
²² May your unfailing love be with us, LORD,
 even as we put our hope in you.

There is some good stuff in this psalm we should not overlook.
 Remember, this was used in their temple services. Their church, so to speak.

One of the first things they are told – and we are told – is to sing joyfully.

V. 1 – Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous;
 it is fitting for the upright to praise him.

It is fitting that we sing with gusto at church – therefore it is wrong to sing otherwise.

It does not say it is fitting to have a great voice while one sings, but to sing joyfully.

Verse 3 says to play skillfully. While we will have plenty more later in the psalms, this is the first of the psalms to mention playing an instrument in worship.

Churches, denomination, get hung up on what is a proper instrument to play and not.

Any instrument is proper when one plays it to the best of their ability in praise of God.

Verse 3 also says to sing a new song.

Oh my – when Sarah suggest a new song for the 9:30 – I hear about it! But it's biblical to sing new songs.

We have a hymnal with hundreds of songs, but most churches get hung up on a very small percentage – and don't sing new songs because they are uncomfortable singing new songs.

Sing new songs!

Verse 3 evens says shout for joy!

It's ok to get loud in worship on occasions.

Most folks get loud at UT games.

God has done a lot more for us than UT football.

Psalm 81

Psalm 81, according to the gittith, begins with – a call to praise God.

VV. 1 – Sing for joy to God our strength;
shout aloud to the God of Jacob!

² Begin the music, strike the timbrel,
play the melodious harp and lyre.

³ Sound the ram's horn at the New Moon,
and when the moon is full, on the day of our festival;

It should be clear by now that worship in the days of Jesus did not consist of sitting down with hands properly folded in one's lap, praying silently. (Psalm 150 evens says to dance!).

Sort of uncharacteristic of hymn psalms, this psalm includes God speaking to the people:

In these verses God speaks to the people, and uses images from stories of the OT. Verses 6 & 7 speak of the Exodus.

VV. 6 – “I removed the burden from their shoulders;
their hands were set free from the basket.

⁷ In your distress you called and I rescued you,
I answered you out of a thundercloud;
I tested you at the waters of Meribah.

Then God speaks of God’s command to have no other Gods.

VV. 8 – Hear me, my people, and I will warn you—
if you would only listen to me, Israel!

⁹ You shall have no foreign god among you;
you shall not worship any god other than me.

¹⁰ I am the LORD your God,
who brought you up out of Egypt.
Open wide your mouth and I will fill it.

What does verse 10 mean – open our mouth and God will fill it?

Matthew 7:7 – “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

God then speaks not to the people, but about the people:

VV. 11 – “But my people would not listen to me;
Israel would not submit to me.

¹² So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts
to follow their own devices.

This sounds very similar to what Paul wrote in Romans 1:24-25 – Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

But that was not the end of the Psalm – nor the end of God’s story.

VV. 13 – “If my people would only listen to me,
 if Israel would only follow my ways,
¹⁴ how quickly I would subdue their enemies
 and turn my hand against their foes!
¹⁵ Those who hate the LORD would cringe before him,
 and their punishment would last forever.
¹⁶ But you would be fed with the finest of wheat;
 with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.”

Our next Hymn Psalm is the 3rd according to the gittith, Psalm 84.

Psalm 84:1 – How lovely is your dwelling place,
 LORD Almighty!
² My soul yearns, even faints,
 for the courts of the LORD;
 my heart and my flesh cry out
 for the living God.
³ Even the sparrow has found a home,
 and the swallow a nest for herself,
 where she may have her young—
 a place near your altar,
 LORD Almighty, my King and my God.
⁴ Blessed are those who dwell in your house;
 they are ever praising you.^[c]

We probably interpret this a little differently than ancient Jews.
 The dwelling place of the Lord was the temple, inside the Holy of Holies.
 But the point of this hymn is certainly valid –

The choir sang of longing to be in a worship service.

Ever wake up in the morning and say to yourself – gosh, I wish it were the day to go to worship, I sure miss it already!
That's what they are singing about.

Typical of praise psalms, we have something from nature in this psalm. A sparrow who has built her nest in the temple – the temple was only closed by curtains, and birds would often make their nest inside.

Verse 4 is prophetic –at least Christians interpret it as so.
Blessed are those who dwell in your house.

Matthew 27:15 tells us that when Jesus died, there was an earthquake, and the veil in the temple was torn in two.
The veil was what was keeping people from the Holy of Holies – the dwelling place of God.

The implication is that now God dwells among us.

So, verse 4 is telling us how blessed we are for we dwell in God's house/presence.

That is something to praise God for!

VV. 5 – Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.

⁶ As they pass through the Valley of Baka,
they make it a place of springs;
the autumn rains also cover it with pools.^[d]

⁷ They go from strength to strength,
till each appears before God in Zion.

The valley of Baka was a dry place. Those who were going to worship God made the valley a place of springs.

When we worship God – the dry places of our lives can be filled with Living Water – the very Spirit of Jesus.

Verse 7 tells us that they go from strength to strength.
 When our strength is in the Lord, we go from strength to strength – we don't get lost in the desert places – the dry places of our lives.

VV. 8 – Hear my prayer, LORD God Almighty;
 listen to me, God of Jacob.
⁹Look on our shield,^[e] O God;
 look with favor on your anointed one.

Your anointed one may have referred to the high priest – the one who stood before God on behalf of the people as they made their sacrifice for their sin.

Our anointed one is Jesus who stands before God as our sacrifice for our sin.

VV. 10 – Better is one day in your courts
 than a thousand elsewhere;
 I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
 than dwell in the tents of the wicked.
¹¹For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
 the LORD bestows favor and honor;
 no good thing does he withhold
 from those whose walk is blameless.
¹²LORD Almighty,
 blessed is the one who trusts in you.

Such joy it is to live in God's presence. This psalm meant so much to an ancient Jew who might have been able to at best once a year make it to the temple – or even once in a life time. So they said, better is one day in God's dwelling place than 1000 elsewhere.

We ought to really be praising because we can live in the presence of the Lord every day!

The last of the Hymn Psalms we will look at is a very simple, but powerful hymn – Psalm 113.

Psalm 113 would begin by the leader of the choir calling out the first verse:

Psalm 113:1 – Praise the LORD.^[a]
 Praise the LORD, you his servants;
 praise the name of the LORD.

Then half of the choir would respond with verses 2 – 4:

VV. 2 – Let the name of the LORD be praised,
 both now and forevermore.
³ From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets,
 the name of the LORD is to be praised.
⁴ The LORD is exalted over all the nations,
 his glory above the heavens.

Then the other half of the choir would respond:

VV. 5 – Who is like the LORD our God,
 the One who sits enthroned on high,
⁶ who stoops down to look
 on the heavens and the earth?
⁷ He raises the poor from the dust
 and lifts the needy from the ash heap;
⁸ he seats them with princes,
 with the princes of his people.
⁹ He settles the childless woman in her home
 as a happy mother of children.
 Praise the LORD.

Communal Laments

The first week we examined Wisdom Psalms.
 Last week we looked at Hymns of Praise

This week we will look at Communal/Community Laments. These Psalms arose out of times of national calamities, and they presented the cause of the nation to God and asked God to intervene.

There are also Individual Laments, and we will look at these next week. Most Laments – Communal or Individual – have similar traits.

1. They have a cry to God for Help
2. Then a description of their situation
3. A prayer for deliverance
4. Sometimes they include words from a prophet – called an oracle – or an expression of confidence that the Lord would answer.

Laments tend to be long psalms, but some are not.

The first Communal Lament is found in **Psalm 44**

It is most likely written after the time of exile. We know this from various verses:

V. 11 – You gave us up to be devoured like sheep
and have scattered us among the nations.

V. 17 – All this came upon us,
though we had not forgotten you;
we had not been false to your covenant.

Certainly many felt that way, but when we read the historical books, we saw that as a nation this was not the case. Many of their kings had been false to the covenant.

Verses 1 – 3 look at God’s deeds in the past:

VV. 1 – We have heard it with our ears, O God;
our ancestors have told us
what you did in their days,
in days long ago.

² With your hand you drove out the nations
 and planted our ancestors;
 you crushed the peoples
 and made our ancestors flourish.
³ It was not by their sword that they won the land,
 nor did their arm bring them victory;
 it was your right hand, your arm,
 and the light of your face, for you loved them.

Next the people claim their allegiance to the Lord:

VV. 4 – You are my King and my God,
 who decrees victories for Jacob.
⁵ Through you we push back our enemies;
 through your name we trample our foes.
⁶ I put no trust in my bow,
 my sword does not bring me victory;
⁷ but you give us victory over our enemies,
 you put our adversaries to shame.
⁸ In God we make our boast all day long,
 and we will praise your name forever.

Next we hear about their present condition:

VV. 9 – But now you have rejected and humbled us;
 you no longer go out with our armies.
¹⁰ You made us retreat before the enemy,
 and our adversaries have plundered us.
¹¹ You gave us up to be devoured like sheep
 and have scattered us among the nations.
¹² You sold your people for a pittance,
 gaining nothing from their sale.
¹³ You have made us a reproach to our neighbors,
 the scorn and derision of those around us.
¹⁴ You have made us a byword among the nations;
 the peoples shake their heads at us.
¹⁵ I live in disgrace all day long,
 and my face is covered with shame

¹⁶ at the taunts of those who reproach and revile me,
because of the enemy, who is bent on revenge.

We find some of the strongest words against God in laments. Yet, have we not all found ourselves in circumstances of life when our words to God are strong?

Why God – why would you let this happen?

What have I done to deserve this, God?

There are times when we can look at our lives and clearly say, “wow God, you got me through that situation – how about getting me through this one”.

Characteristic of laments, there is a plea to God to intervene.

VV. 23 – Awake, Lord! Why do you sleep?

Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever.

²⁴ Why do you hide your face
and forget our misery and oppression?

²⁵ We are brought down to the dust;
our bodies cling to the ground.

²⁶ Rise up and help us;
rescue us because of your unfailing love.

People of the NT – Christians – have a little deeper theological understanding of suffering due to the fallen nature of humanity, but these are our questions at times, and our prayer to God.

One verse of this Psalm is quoted by Paul – do you recognize the passage?

V. 22 – Yet for your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.

Romans 8:31 – What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”^[j]

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,^[k] neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The next communal lament we will look at is a bit different than Psalm 44.

Psalm 58

Notice the heading of this psalm – A *Miktam* of David.

It’s an ancient word, and scholars are divided as to what it actually means.

There are only 6 psalms called Miktam, and all 6 are laments – so it probably refers to the subject – perhaps the musical setting.

All 6 Miktam’s are linked to David.

Psalm 58 is different in that the psalmist is not lamenting God’s inaction to protect God’s people, but rather lamenting that God is not dealing with the wicked of their land – their own people.

Psalm 58:1 – Do you rulers indeed speak justly?

Do you judge people with equity?

I just read from the NIV – but your translation may be different. The KJV has: Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O congregation? do ye judge uprightly, O ye sons of men?

The RSV has: Do you indeed decree what is right, you gods?

Other translations have – mighty lords.

It's difficult to interpret from the ancient texts – but many scholars believe that the psalmist is petitioning God's heavenly court to intervene.

Psalm 58:1 – Do you rulers indeed speak justly?

Do you judge people with equity?

²No, in your heart you devise injustice,
and your hands mete out violence on the earth.

³Even from birth the wicked go astray;
from the womb they are wayward, spreading lies.

⁴Their venom is like the venom of a snake,
like that of a cobra that has stopped its ears,

⁵that will not heed the tune of the charmer,
however skillful the enchanter may be.

⁶Break the teeth in their mouths, O God;
LORD, tear out the fangs of those lions!

⁷Let them vanish like water that flows away;
when they draw the bow, let their arrows fall short.

⁸May they be like a slug that melts away as it moves along,
like a stillborn child that never sees the sun.

⁹Before your pots can feel the heat of the thorns—
whether they be green or dry—the wicked will be swept away.

You kind of get the feeling that the psalmist has had enough of the wickedness of people, don't you?

And, don't we feel this way to – to some degree at times?

VV. 10 – The righteous will be glad when they are avenged,
when they dip their feet in the blood of the wicked.

¹¹Then people will say,
“Surely the righteous still are rewarded;
surely there is a God who judges the earth.”

This is probably not a psalm that you would want to lead devotions with! It's an honest prayer – but like much of what we find in the OT, let us remember that we know the whole story.

We know – like verse 11 states – that there is a God who judges the earth, and that the righteous are rewarded.

Our reward, however, may not fully be experienced in this life.

Next we will look at Psalm 60 – Also a Mitkam.
This psalm begins with their situation of national distress.

Psalm 60:1 – You have rejected us, God, and burst upon us;
you have been angry—now restore us!
² You have shaken the land and torn it open;
mend its fractures, for it is quaking.
³ You have shown your people desperate times;
you have given us wine that makes us stagger.
⁴ But for those who fear you, you have raised a banner
to be unfurled against the bow.
⁵ Save us and help us with your right hand,
that those you love may be delivered.

Verse 4 is interesting – raising a banner was usually given to signify victory. Not so here.

Here it signifies that God that God has provided for them even in their defeat as a nation.

If this was written after the exile – remember that for many of the Jews who were carried away in to Babylon, it was not the worst of times. Many of them prospered in their new land. This was the banner that was raised.

Characteristic of some laments, we have a oracle, or prophecy from God.

VV. 6 – God has spoken from his sanctuary:
“In triumph I will parcel out Shechem
and measure off the Valley of Sukkoth.

⁷ Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine;
 Ephraim is my helmet,
 Judah is my scepter.
⁸ Moab is my washbasin,
 on Edom I toss my sandal;
 over Philistia I shout in triumph.”

Never again in Biblical times did Israel have such territory.
 Does this speak of today?
 Or, is this spiritualized – dealing with the influence of Christianity?

Note what God actually says – The lands were God’s. God never actually says they will be Israel’s. Perhaps God is saying that God is God of all people & all lands, regardless of what government exists there.

After God speaks, the psalmist asks how – And acknowledges that it can only happen with God’s help.

VV. 9 – Who will bring me to the fortified city?

Who will lead me to Edom?

¹⁰ Is it not you, God, you who have now rejected us
 and no longer go out with our armies?

¹¹ Give us aid against the enemy,
 for human help is worthless.

¹² With God we will gain the victory,
 and he will trample down our enemies.

Next we go to Psalm 74.

This is a lament for Judah, the southern kingdom after the nation was divided – so written before the time of exile.

It opens with an appeal to God.

Psalm 74:1 – O God, why have you rejected us forever?

Why does your anger smolder against the sheep of your pasture?

² Remember the nation you purchased long ago,
 the people (tribe/rod) of your inheritance, whom you redeemed—
 Mount Zion, where you dwelt.

It may say rod in your Bible – KJV – the Hebrew word for rod & tribe were the same.

We have words that have two meaning.

Next, we have the condition, the reason for their lament.

VV. 3 – Turn your steps toward these everlasting ruins,
 all this destruction the enemy has brought on the sanctuary (temple).

⁴ Your foes roared in the (holy) place where you met with us;
 they set up their standards as signs.

⁵ They behaved like men wielding axes
 to cut through a thicket of trees.

⁶ They smashed all the carved paneling
 with their axes and hatchets.

⁷ They burned your sanctuary to the ground;
 they defiled the dwelling place of your Name.

The interior of Solomon's temple were paneled with cedar, decorated with carvings of cherubim, palm trees & flowers. Nebuzaradan was reported to have burned the temple in 587 BC, so this lament may depict scenes leading up to the captivity of the people.

VV. 8 – They said in their hearts, “We will crush them completely!”
 They burned every place where God was worshiped in the land.

⁹ We are given no signs from God;
 no prophets are left,
 and none of us knows how long this will be.

In verses 12 – 17 we actually have a short hymn of praise of God, perhaps as part of their petition to God to intervene.

VV. 12 – But God is my King from long ago;
 he brings salvation on the earth.

¹³ It was you who split open the sea by your power;
 you broke the heads of the monster in the waters.

- ¹⁴ It was you who crushed the heads of Leviathan
and gave it as food to the creatures of the desert.
- ¹⁵ It was you who opened up springs and streams;
you dried up the ever-flowing rivers.
- ¹⁶ The day is yours, and yours also the night;
you established the sun and moon.
- ¹⁷ It was you who set all the boundaries of the earth;
you made both summer and winter.

After the hymn of praise, we have a concluding appeal to God.

- VV. 18** – Remember how the enemy has mocked you, LORD,
how foolish people have reviled your name.
- ¹⁹ Do not hand over the life of your dove to wild beasts;
do not forget the lives of your afflicted people forever.
- ²⁰ Have regard for your covenant,
because haunts of violence fill the dark places of the land.
- ²¹ Do not let the oppressed retreat in disgrace;
may the poor and needy praise your name.
- ²² Rise up, O God, and defend your cause;
remember how fools mock you all day long.
- ²³ Do not ignore the clamor of your adversaries,
the uproar of your enemies, which rises continually.

Next we have Psalm 79. The lament looks at some unnamed Gentile assault upon Judah. The exact attack cannot be determined, but warfare was constant in those days.

- Psalm 79:1** – O God, the nations have invaded your inheritance;
they have defiled your holy temple,
they have reduced Jerusalem to rubble.
- ² They have left the dead bodies of your servants
as food for the birds of the sky,
the flesh of your own people for the animals of the wild.
- ³ They have poured out blood like water
all around Jerusalem,
and there is no one to bury the dead.

⁴ We are objects of contempt to our neighbors,
of scorn and derision to those around us.

The temple was defiled, not necessarily destroyed.
It does say Jerusalem had been reduced to rubble, but this may have been poetic license of some general warfare with some neighboring kingdom.

Next we have the plea for God's intervention.

VV. 5 – How long, LORD? Will you be angry forever?
How long will your jealousy (jealous wrath) burn like fire?
⁶ Pour out your wrath on the nations
that do not acknowledge you,
on the kingdoms
that do not call on your name;
⁷ for they have devoured Jacob
and devastated his homeland.

(signifying some widespread warfare, not just Jerusalem)

We know that in the period of the kings, they had peace, then warfare which was always linked to their straying from God's covenant. This was a constant cycle. – Loyalty to God & peace, sin & warfare.

Verses 8 & 9 place this lament somewhere in that time frame.

VV. 8 – Do not hold against us the sins of past generations;
may your mercy come quickly to meet us,
for we are in desperate need.
⁹ Help us, God our Savior,
for the glory of your name;
deliver us and forgive our sins
for your name's sake.

VV. 10 – Why should the nations say,
“Where is their God?”
Before our eyes, make known among the nations
that you avenge the outpoured blood of your servants.

- ¹¹ May the groans of the prisoners come before you;
with your strong arm preserve those condemned to die.
- ¹² Pay back into the laps of our neighbors seven times
the contempt they have hurled at you, Lord.
- ¹³ Then we your people, the sheep of your pasture,
will praise you forever;
from generation to generation
we will proclaim your praise.

What do you think of this prayer – pay back into the laps of our neighbors 7 times
the contempt?

Is that Christian?

Should this be our prayer?

Remember – we don't include the OT because everything in it is right & just.
We include it to show the journey – the growing understanding of God – of God's
nature – and of God's desire for us.

We have been looking at Laments from the southern kingdom, now we have a
lament that is connected with the northern kingdom. Psalm 80.

Scholars date it somewhere around 700 BC.

It begins with a plea to God.

Psalm 80:1 – Hear us, Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock.
You who sit enthroned between the cherubim,
shine forth
² before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.
Awaken your might;
come and save us.
³ Restore us, O God;
make your face shine on us,
that we may be saved.

We have all sorts of words & phrases that show this is of the northern kingdom.
Shepherd of Israel – Joseph – Ephraim, Manasseh.

Restore us does not mean from exile – but to our former state of life.

Then we have the nation's plight:

VV. 4 – How long, LORD God Almighty,

Literally – Lord God of Hosts – and was a northern kingdom term for God

will your anger smolder
against the prayers of your people?

⁵ You have fed them with the bread of tears;
you have made them drink tears by the bowlful.

⁶ You have made us an object of derision^[b] to our neighbors,
and our enemies mock us.

⁷ Restore us, God Almighty;
make your face shine on us,
that we may be saved.

We know that Jesus referred to himself as the true vine, and we are the branches.
This psalm uses such imagery as the people as God's vine.

VV. 8 – You transplanted a vine from Egypt;
you drove out the nations and planted it.

⁹ You cleared the ground for it,
and it took root and filled the land.

¹⁰ The mountains were covered with its shade,
the mighty cedars with its branches.

¹¹ Its branches reached as far as the Sea,
its shoots as far as the River.

¹² Why have you broken down its walls
so that all who pass by pick its grapes?

¹³ *Boars* from the forest ravage it,
and insects from the fields feed on it.

This psalm ends as most laments do:

V. 19 – Restore us, LORD God Almighty;
 make your face shine on us,
 that we may be saved.

Next we look at Psalm 83.

Psalm 83 is a little difficult to date because of all the enemies mentioned in this psalm.

There was no time in their history when all of those mentioned here were against them at the same time.

So, this is probably written late in their history during a time of conflict, and all the previous enemies were given, sort of a history of their woes.

Psalm 83:1 – O God, do not remain silent;
 do not turn a deaf ear,
 do not stand aloof, O God.

² See how your enemies growl,
 how your foes rear their heads.

³ With cunning they conspire against your people;
 they plot against those you cherish.

⁴ “Come,” they say, “let us destroy them as a nation,
 so that Israel’s name is remembered no more.”

Let’s look at the list of enemies:

VV. 5 – With one mind they plot together;
 they form an alliance against you—

⁶ the tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites,
 of Moab and the Hagrites,

⁷ Byblos, Ammon and Amalek,
 Philistia, with the people of Tyre.

⁸ Even Assyria has joined them
 to reinforce Lot’s descendants.

This lament was probably written in response to Assyrian aggression – and all the prior enemies were listed and the psalmist was saying – in a poem – and now these guys too!

Like all laments, God is petitioned to destroy their enemies.

VV. 13 – Make them like tumbleweed, my God,
 like chaff before the wind.
¹⁴ As fire consumes the forest
 or a flame sets the mountains ablaze,
¹⁵ so pursue them with your tempest
 and terrify them with your storm.
¹⁶ Cover their faces with shame, LORD,
 so that they will seek your name.
¹⁷ May they ever be ashamed and dismayed;
 may they perish in disgrace.
¹⁸ Let them know that you, whose name is the LORD—
 that you alone are the Most High over all the earth.

Next we have a long lament that actually begins with a joyous hymn.
 Psalm 106 –

If we were to judge it by how it begins, we would never think this is a lament.

Psalm 106:1 – Praise the LORD.
 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
 his love endures forever.
² Who can proclaim the mighty acts of the LORD
 or fully declare his praise?
³ Blessed are those who act justly,
 who always do what is right.
⁴ Remember me, LORD, when you show favor to your people,
 come to my aid when you save them,
⁵ that I may enjoy the prosperity of your chosen ones,
 that I may share in the joy of your nation
 and join your inheritance in giving praise.

This is a lengthy psalm.

Verse 6 -12 acknowledge their sin, but claim even their ancestors crossing the red sea had sinned, yet God protected them.

Verses 13-18 look at their wilderness years.

In verses 19-23 they recall the incident with the Golden Calf.

Note there in verse 19 it's called Mt. Horeb – also a name for Mt. Sinai.

All the while the psalmist is reminding God of the people's sin – yet God remained steadfast.

Verses 24-27 remember how the spies were scared to move forward.

Verses 28-31 recalled how they worshiped Baal at Peor.

On and on it goes, recalling their sinfulness.

And then, beginning in verse 40, we are told of God's mercy:

VV. 40 – Therefore the LORD was angry with his people
and abhorred his inheritance.

⁴¹ He gave them into the hands of the nations,
and their foes ruled over them.

⁴² Their enemies oppressed them
and subjected them to their power.

⁴³ Many times he delivered them,
but they were bent on rebellion
and they wasted away in their sin.

⁴⁴ Yet he took note of their distress
when he heard their cry;

⁴⁵ for their sake he remembered his covenant
and out of his great love he relented.

⁴⁶ He caused all who held them captive
to show them mercy.

The psalm ends with an appeal for help – and praise.

VV. 47 – Save us, LORD our God,
 and gather us from the nations,
 that we may give thanks to your holy name
 and glory in your praise.
⁴⁸ Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel,
 from everlasting to everlasting.
 Let all the people say, “Amen!”
 Praise the LORD.

Individual Laments

Next we will explore individual Laments. Not all of them, as they the most common type of Psalm – about 40 of the Psalms are individual laments.

Individual laments are the cries of an individual to God for help from various circumstances. Some even invoke God to act against the enemy.

The first individual lament is Psalm 3.

The title above this Psalm says: A psalm of David. When he fled from his son Absalom. The events of the story of Absalom’s rebellion are found in 2 Samuel 15.

Like a number of the laments, Psalm 3 contains strophes – or verses – of equal length with the last verse being shortened. It was the most common poetic meter found in the ancient Hebrew.

In the opening verses we are told of David’s desperate plight.

VV. 1 – LORD, how many are my foes!
 How many rise up against me!
² Many are saying of me,
 “God will not deliver him.”

Something that I find refreshing – and hopeful to me – is that in many of the laments we find confidence in God during times of deep trouble.

VV. 3 – But you, LORD, are a shield around me,
my glory, the One who lifts my head high.

⁴I call out to the LORD,
and he answers me from his holy mountain.

⁵I lie down and sleep;
I wake again, because the LORD sustains me.

⁶I will not fear though tens of thousands
assail me on every side.

Having stated his confidence in the Lord, David petitions God for help.

V. 7 – Arise, LORD!

Deliver me, my God!

Strike all my enemies on the jaw;
break the teeth of the wicked.

While this may seem harsh to our modern Christian sensibilities, we can find something significant here.

David is asking for God to do the avenging.

He didn't say, let me kick their butts God – let me get even God – let me get ahead God.

He is asking that any vengeance given be given by God.

In his culture, that was significant.

He reaffirms his trust in God in the closing verse.

V. 8 – From the LORD comes deliverance.

May your blessing be on your people.

The next Individual lament is Psalm 4. It begins with a characteristic appeal to God.

Psalm 4:1 – Answer me when I call to you,
 my righteous God.
 Give me relief from my distress;
 have mercy on me and hear my prayer.

Even though this is a lament, and an appeal to God, we should note that there is confidence in the psalmists plea – my righteous God.

Also, some translation read a little differently than the NIV which I read. Some say: Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness!
 You have relieved me in *my* distress;
 Have mercy on me, and hear my prayer.

Certainly we find more confidence in that translation.

A word about translations – We have no original manuscripts of either the OT or the NT.

The texts were copied by hand for centuries. Some of the more recent modern translations have looked back upon the older manuscripts that have been discovered –

With the thought being if things were copied by hand over and over again – then the older we look at the more likely is will be like the original, which we believe to be the inspired Word of God.

Back to Psalm 4 ...

In verses 2 & 3, the psalmist says that he is the target of accusations which would turn his honor into disgrace.

VV. 2 – How long will you people (or sons of men, depicting men of status) turn my glory into shame?

How long will you love delusions and seek false gods (or lies)?

³ Know that the LORD has set apart his faithful servant for himself;
 the LORD hears when I call to him.

He is having a difficult time, but he has confidence that the Lord will hear him. So it's a lament, but a little more confident than the community laments we looked at last week.

The Psalmist gives advice to those who – like him – are dealing with difficult people.

VV. 4 – Tremble (or in your anger) and do not sin; (Paul quotes this in Eph 4:26)
 when you are on your beds,
 search your hearts and be silent.
⁵ Offer the sacrifices of the righteous
 and trust in the LORD.

Next, the psalmist offers more advice to those who – when faced with difficulty, or difficult people, turn to despair.

V. 6 – Many, LORD, are asking, “Who will bring us prosperity?”
 Let the light of your face shine on us.

This verse recalls the priestly benediction given in Numbers 6:24-26.

V. 7 – Fill my heart with joy
 when their grain and new wine abound.

Even when those who accuse us – or who treat us wrong – when they prosper, we should remain filled with the joy of the Lord.

The lament ends on a note of confidence.

V. 8 – In peace I will lie down and sleep,
 for you alone, LORD,
 make me dwell in safety.

We won't look at all of the individual laments, I can provide a list of them if you like.

Let's go to a lament that has some very familiar words, and most Christians do not know it's originally from the Psalms. Reading this next psalm may help understand some of the words of Jesus on the cross.

Psalm 22

V. 1 – My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Most Christians recognize those words as some of the last of Jesus. It's interesting to note that there was a Jewish tradition of saying the first line of a psalm as one offered up the entire psalm as a prayer to God.

So, if the first line represented the entire psalm, and this prayer was Jesus' last, let's dig into this psalm.

Psalm 22 is divided into two parts. The first part, verses 1-21, is a cry of agony to God.

VV. 1 – My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish?

² My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, but I find no rest.

³ Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the one Israel praises.

⁴ In you our ancestors put their trust;
they trusted and you delivered them.

⁵ To you they cried out and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

So the psalm opens with question to God – why have you forsaken me, why do you not answer when I cry out.

Then in verse three we have “yet”. Nevertheless – you are God.
 There is a recognition in this psalm that there is much of God that we do not understand. There is much suffering in the world, and sometimes all we can say is
 – Yet God is God and God reigns.

The psalmist trusted God, but ... V 6.

VV. 6 – But I am a worm and not a man,
 scorned by everyone, despised by the people.
⁷ All who see me mock me;
 they hurl insults, shaking their heads.
⁸ “He trusts in the LORD,” they say,
 “let the LORD rescue him.
 Let him deliver him,
 since he delights in him.”
⁹ Yet you brought me out of the womb;
 you made me trust in you, even at my mother’s breast.
¹⁰ From birth I was cast on you;
 from my mother’s womb you have been my God.
¹¹ Do not be far from me,
 for trouble is near
 and there is no one to help.

Think of what Jesus had been through when this psalm was on his heart:

VV. 12 – Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. (rich grazing land east of Sea of Galilee)

¹³ Roaring lions that tear their prey
 open their mouths wide against me.
¹⁴ I am poured out like water,
 and all my bones are out of joint.
 My heart has turned to wax;
 it has melted within me.
¹⁵ My mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
 and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
 you lay me in the dust of death.

VV. 16 – Dogs surround me,
 a pack of villains encircles me;
 they pierce my hands and my feet.
¹⁷ All my bones are on display;
 people stare and gloat over me.
¹⁸ They divide my clothes among them
 and cast lots for my garment.

The prayer starts to turn around in the following verses.

VV. 19 – But you, LORD, do not be far from me.
 You are my strength; come quickly to help me.
²⁰ Deliver me from the sword,
 my precious life from the power of the dogs.
²¹ Rescue me from the mouth of the lions;
 save me from the horns of the wild oxen.

Again we have confidence that God can win the victory.

But in the following verses – the second half of the Psalm, the psalmist who was just uttering a cry of despair is now giving a hymn of thanksgiving for his deliverance.

VV. 22 – I will declare your name to my people;
 in the assembly I will praise you.
²³ You who fear the LORD, praise him!
 All you descendants of Jacob, honor him!
 Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!
²⁴ For he has not despised or scorned
 the suffering of the afflicted one;
 he has not hidden his face from him
 but has listened to his cry for help.

In essence – if Jesus' words from the beginning of this psalm represented the entire psalm, this psalm is a picture of the world, and the world's plight.

The people of this world may have thought they were despised – lost. We who are the afflicted one there in verse 24 – are not despised. God has listened to our cry for help.

VV. 25 – From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly;
 before those who fear you I will fulfill my vows.

²⁶ *The poor will eat and be satisfied;*
 those who seek the LORD will praise him—
 may your hearts live forever!

²⁷ All the ends of the earth
 will remember and turn to the LORD,
 and all the families of the nations
 will bow down before him,

²⁸ for dominion belongs to the LORD
 and he rules over the nations.

²⁹ All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;
 all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—
 those who cannot keep themselves alive.

³⁰ Posterity will serve him;
 future generations will be told about the Lord.

³¹ They will proclaim his righteousness,
 declaring to a people yet unborn:
 He has done it!

Next we will go to Psalm 31, which is three laments in one.

The first is verses 1-8.

In this first lament, the psalmist is not lamenting so much something that has happened, but rather some impending trouble.

Psalm 31:1 – In you, LORD, I have taken refuge;
 let me never be put to shame;
 deliver me in your righteousness.

² Turn your ear to me,
 come quickly to my rescue;
 be my rock of refuge,
 a strong fortress to save me.

³ Since you are my rock and my fortress,
 for the sake of your name lead and guide me.

⁴ Keep me free from the trap that is set for me,
 for you are my refuge.

⁵ Into your hands I commit my spirit;
 deliver me, LORD, my faithful God.

- ⁶ I hate those who cling to worthless idols;
as for me, I trust in the LORD.
- ⁷ I will be glad and rejoice in your love,
for you saw my affliction
and knew the anguish of my soul.
- ⁸ You have not given me into the hands of the enemy
but have set my feet in a spacious place.

The next lament is of one who has been afflicted with a disease.

- VV. 9 – Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am in distress;
my eyes grow weak with sorrow,
my soul and body with grief.
- ¹⁰ My life is consumed by anguish
and my years by groaning;
my strength fails because of my affliction,
and my bones grow weak.
- ¹¹ Because of all my enemies,
I am the utter contempt of my neighbors
and an object of dread to my closest friends—
those who see me on the street flee from me.
- ¹² I am forgotten as though I were dead;
I have become like broken pottery.

The next lament is one that laments false accusations, who plot against him.

- VV. 13 – For I hear many whispering,
“Terror on every side!”
They conspire against me
and plot to take my life.
- ¹⁴ But I trust in you, LORD;
I say, “You are my God.”
- ¹⁵ My times are in your hands;
deliver me from the hands of my enemies,
from those who pursue me.
- ¹⁶ Let your face shine on your servant;
save me in your unfailing love.
- ¹⁷ Let me not be put to shame, LORD,
for I have cried out to you;
but let the wicked be put to shame

and be silent in the realm of the dead.
¹⁸ Let their lying lips be silenced,
 for with pride and contempt
 they speak arrogantly against the righteous.

The Psalm ends with a thanksgiving for God's gracious response.

VV. 19 – How abundant are the good things
 that you have stored up for those who fear you,
 that you bestow in the sight of all,
 on those who take refuge in you.
²⁰ In the shelter of your presence you hide them
 from all human intrigues;
 you keep them safe in your dwelling
 from accusing tongues.
²¹ Praise be to the LORD,
 for he showed me the wonders of his love
 when I was in a city under siege.
²² In my alarm I said,
 "I am cut off from your sight!"
 Yet you heard my cry for mercy
 when I called to you for help.
²³ Love the LORD, all his faithful people!
 The LORD preserves those who are true to him,
 but the proud he pays back in full.
²⁴ Be strong and take heart,
 all you who hope in the LORD.

The next lament we will look at is probably familiar to many. We have probably heard a few hymns with these words.

Psalm 42

In some Hebrew manuscripts, Psalm 42 & 43 are listed as one psalm. Most, however, have them as two. Both are individual laments.

In the opening verses of Psalm 42, the psalmist writes of his thirst for God, and his longing to be in God's temple.

Psalm 42:1 – As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God.

² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?

³ My tears have been my food
day and night,
while people say to me all day long,
“Where is your God?”

⁴ These things I remember
as I pour out my soul:
how I used to go to the house of God
under the protection of the Mighty One
with shouts of joy and praise
among the festive throng.

⁵ Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God.

One would think that this psalm was written during the time after the exile to Babylon, but the language suggests not. So, this is not someone removed from their land, but simply someone who truly desires to be in God’s presence.

In the second half of the psalm, it seems as if some sickness has taken over the psalmist, and he is unable to go to the temple, hence his lament.

VV. 6 – My soul is downcast within me;
therefore I will remember you
from the land of the Jordan,
the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.

⁷ Deep calls to deep
in the roar of your waterfalls;
all your waves and breakers
have swept over me.

⁸ By day the LORD directs his love,
at night his song is with me—
a prayer to the God of my life.

⁹ I say to God my Rock,
 “Why have you forgotten me?
 Why must I go about mourning,
 oppressed by the enemy?”
¹⁰ My bones suffer mortal agony
 as my foes taunt me,
 saying to me all day long,
 “Where is your God?”
¹¹ Why, my soul, are you downcast?
 Why so disturbed within me?
 Put your hope in God,
 for I will yet praise him,
 my Savior and my God.

Since Psalm 42 & 43 are often thought as one, let’s take a look at it.

Something we find in Psalm 43, that we will look at in another psalm, is the psalmist asking God for vindication.

Like Psalm 42, this psalm does lament not being at God temple – though here called God’s Holy Mountain.

Psalm 43:1 – Vindicate me, my God,
 and plead my cause
 against an unfaithful nation.
 Rescue me from those who are
 deceitful and wicked.
² You are God my stronghold.
 Why have you rejected me?
 Why must I go about mourning,
 oppressed by the enemy?
³ Send me your light and your faithful care,
 let them lead me;
 let them bring me to your holy mountain,
 to the place where you dwell.
⁴ Then I will go to the altar of God,
 to God, my joy and my delight.
 I will praise you with the lyre,
 O God, my God.

⁵ Why, my soul, are you downcast?
 Why so disturbed within me?
 Put your hope in God,
 for I will yet praise him,
 my Savior and my God.

Psalm 71

Psalm 71 is the prayer of a dying man

Psalm 71:1 – In you, LORD, I have taken refuge;
 let me never be put to shame.
² In your righteousness, rescue me and deliver me;
 turn your ear to me and save me.
³ Be my rock of refuge,
 to which I can always go;
 give the command to save me,
 for you are my rock and my fortress.

This – by the way – is almost the same as Psalm 31:1-3

VV. 1 – In you, LORD, I have taken refuge;
 let me never be put to shame;
 deliver me in your righteousness.
² Turn your ear to me,
 come quickly to my rescue;
 be my rock of refuge,
 a strong fortress to save me.
³ Since you are my rock and my fortress,
 for the sake of your name lead and guide me.

It may not have been written by the same author, for much of the language suggests this is a later psalm.

Psalm 71:4 – Deliver me, my God, from the hand of the wicked,
 from the grasp of those who are evil and cruel.
⁵ For you have been my hope, Sovereign LORD,
 my confidence since my youth.

- ⁶ From birth I have relied on you;
 you brought me forth from my mother's womb.
 I will ever praise you.
- ⁷ I have become a sign to many;
 you are my strong refuge.
- ⁸ My mouth is filled with your praise,
 declaring your splendor all day long.
- ⁹ Do not cast me away when I am old;
 do not forsake me when my strength is gone.
- ¹⁰ For my enemies speak against me;
 those who wait to kill me conspire together.
- ¹¹ They say, "God has forsaken him;
 pursue him and seize him,
 for no one will rescue him."

Again we have the psalmist asking God to deal with one's enemies/accusers.

- VV. 12 – Do not be far from me, my God;
 come quickly, God, to help me.
- ¹³ May my accusers perish in shame;
 may those who want to harm me
 be covered with scorn and disgrace.
- ¹⁴ As for me, I will always have hope;
 I will praise you more and more.
- ¹⁵ My mouth will tell of your righteous deeds,
 of your saving acts all day long—
 though I know not how to relate them all.
- ¹⁶ I will come and proclaim your mighty acts, Sovereign LORD;
 I will proclaim your righteous deeds, yours alone.

Let's go down to verse 22 – which ends with praise:

- VV. 22 – I will praise you with the harp
 for your faithfulness, my God;
 I will sing praise to you with the lyre,
 Holy One of Israel.
- ²³ My lips will shout for joy
 when I sing praise to you—
 I whom you have delivered.

²⁴ My tongue will tell of your righteous acts
 all day long,
 for those who wanted to harm me
 have been put to shame and confusion.

Let's go to Psalm 130 – a song of ascents – which were songs sung on the way to Jerusalem, ascending into Jerusalem.
 May have also been sung ascending the steps of the temple.

What makes this lament so popular is that we really don't know what the psalmist's affliction was, just that he cried out to the Lord. So – it's a lament for us all.

By the language, this appears to be one of the last psalms written.

Psalm 130:1 – Out of the depths I cry to you, LORD;
² Lord, hear my voice.
 Let your ears be attentive
 to my cry for mercy.

VV. 3 – If you, LORD, kept a record of sins,
 Lord, who could stand?
⁴ But with you there is forgiveness,
 so that we can, with reverence, serve you.

We don't know if his lament was due to his sin, but this psalm is unique in that it contains a confession of sin.
 Well, what actually makes it unique is that there is no mention of atoning sacrifices for sin.

Prophetic, perhaps. Sin is not resolved by our actions/sacrifices – but by waiting on the Lord. This is where our hope lies.

VV. 5 – I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits,
 and in his word I put my hope.

- ⁶I wait for the Lord
more than watchmen wait for the morning,
more than watchmen wait for the morning.
- ⁷Israel, put your hope in the LORD,
for with the LORD is unfailing love
and with him is full redemption.
- ⁸He himself will redeem Israel
from all their sins.