

# PSALMS 1-41

## (Book 1)

*Psalms are songs and prayers.*

*They have been in constant use for thousands of years.*

*Psalms and hymns based on Psalms are found in almost every Christian and Jewish worship service.*

Many Psalms in this section have particular significance for Holy Week and Easter. “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” - one of Jesus’ statements from the cross - is the opening line of Psalm 22. We read the entire Psalm on Maundy Thursday.

*Happy are those  
Who do not follow the advice of the wicked,  
Or take the path that sinners tread  
Or sit in the seat of scoffers;  
But their delight is in the law of the Lord,  
And on his law they meditate day and night.  
They are like trees planted by streams of water,  
Which yield their fruit in due season,  
And their leaves do not wither.  
In all that they do, they prosper.*  
Psalm 1:1-3

*I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill.  
Serve the Lord with fear,  
With trembling kiss his feet.  
Happy are all who take refuge in him.*  
Psalm 2:1, 6, 11

Psalm 2 is also the first of many Psalms that describe Jesus. *I will tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you.”* (Psalm 2:7) Jesus and the New Testament writers refer often to the Psalms to show what had to happen (prescriptive) and to describe what did happen. Psalm 22 powerfully expresses Jesus’ suffering and crucifixion – and ends with praise. Psalm 8, 22, 23, 31, and 34 are notable examples of this. How many more can you find?

The book of Psalms begins with a promise: Those who meditate on God’s teaching will be **happy**. Peace, joy, and inner stability, **prospering**, is promised here and repeated throughout Scripture. (Torah is law, instruction, the word of God.)

Yet the majority of Psalms in Book One are laments. The Psalmist feels depressed, faces enemies and betrayal, and confronts “the why” of misfortune. Psalms are usually written for a community at worship (we), but many of these are individual (I) laments. These Psalms are honest dialogue between the believer and God, the passionate meditation on God’s instruction in a world that lives by different rules. Each one concludes with praise and trust: I may not feel OK, but I will be OK and God is good.

Psalm 1 and Psalm 2 set the state for the rest of the collection. After the promise, Psalm 2 affirms the power of God over all other authorities.

*Why do the nations conspire,  
And the peoples plot in vain?*

In conclusion, the four distinctive characteristics of Book One of the Psalms are:

1. Worship and praise
2. Lament
3. Descriptions of Jesus
4. Individual dialogue with God

The division of the Psalms into five sections (or books) is very ancient. They are Psalms 1-41, Psalms 42-72, Psalms 73-89, Psalms 90-106, and Psalms 107-150. Each section concludes with a doxology or psalm of praise. Psalm 150 is a concluding doxology for the whole book. *Let everything that breathes, praise the Lord!*

The reasons for the division are lost in time. One possibility is that they were collected at five different time periods.

### How to read the Psalms

In order or randomly? *Both are fine.*

**Speak them, sing them, pray them, cry them, whisper, shout, jump all about.**