

# Bible Challenge 2018

## Week 19-23: May 6-June 9

### Summary

Psalms 1-41: Book 1 of the Psalms (Mostly Psalms of David)

Psalms 42-72: Book 2 of the Psalms (Mostly Psalms of David plus Psalms of the Sons of Korah)

Psalms 73-89: Book 3 of the Psalms (Mostly Psalms of Asaph and the Sons of Korah)

Psalms 90-106: Book 4 of the Psalms (Mostly Anonymous Psalms)

Psalms 107-150: Book 5 of the Psalms (Mostly Hallelujah Psalms)

The book of Psalms that we have today is actually made up of five "books" or "scrolls" in the Hebrew text. It is a reminder to us that these were collected for the worship of God's people across a number of generations before they arrived at their final form. The psalms at the book divisions end with the phrase, "Amen and Amen," essentially a doxology for each separate book of psalms and Psalm 150 functions as the great doxology of the whole book — it is the "Amen and Amen" of the people.

Over the following weeks, you will be progressively reading through a book of the Psalms each week. My prayer for you is that these psalms don't just all run together, but that you be creative as to how you read through them. If you are musically inclined, all of the psalms have been versified so that they can be sung (let me know if you would like to borrow one of my psalters if you want to give this a try). If you are not as musically inclined, treat each of these psalms as a prayer. The key is to ponder the ideas they contain and meditate on them; allow them to saturate your soul.

### Superscriptions

One hundred and sixteen of the Psalms have superscriptions. This would be the small, bold-print text placed at the top of the psalm to which it speaks. These superscriptions typically tell the author and sometimes also give the name of the song the music is sung to and sometimes even the historical event that prompted the psalm.

It should be noted that these superscriptions are actually a part of the ancient Hebrew text. These are not like section headings placed in many of our Bible translations, but in the Hebrew they are either verse 1 of the psalm or they are the first part of verse 1 of the psalm. That means these superscriptions are part of the inspired text and ought to be read and studied. They are also to be treated as reliable when they speak of authorship or historical events surrounding the text.

Of these 116 superscripts, 73 of them attribute the psalm to David and 55 are written for the "Director of Music," which is a reference to the Levitical Priest in charge of the singing of God's people in worship. Note that there are some who suggest that where psalms are not superscribed, the psalm in question is connected with the previous psalm's superscription.

### Selah

I regularly get asked the question, "What does 'Selah' mean?" The answer that I give is, "We don't know for sure." This word shows up 71 times in the book of Psalms and then an additional 3 times in the book of Habakkuk. It seems to be some sort of musical instruction, but again, the specific instruction it gives has been lost to antiquity.

Suggestions abound. Some have said it is a Persian loanword which reflects the sound of a stringed instrument (making it a synonym to the Hebrew word we translate as "psalm"). That does not help us much unless it is an instruction for a stringed instrument to play a little solo or bridge between verses. Some suggest that it is

related to the Hebrew word, *salal*, which refers to the raising your voice to a higher pitch. Others suggest a pause. We simply do not know and cannot say for sure, but again, it is part of the Biblical and Inspired text, so we ought to read and study the term as part of our Biblical studies.

### Psalm

We get the word, "psalm" from the Greek word, "psalmos." This word translates the Hebrew word, "mizmor." In Hebrew, a "mizmor" is literally a reference to a song sung to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument. It is a reminder that most of the psalms were originally played on a hand-held harp, the granddaddy of the lute and of the acoustic guitar. Certainly in the Temple they had a variety of instruments, but this simple instrument was what one would find in family and personal worship as well as in the synagogue (or, if people did not play the harp, things were sung a-cappella).

### Types of Psalm

John Calvin described the book of psalms as the anatomy of the human heart — in other words, every emotion known to man is found expressed within the psalms in a perfectly inspired and sinless way. That means that if we need to figure out how to express our righteous outrage at an injustice done, our grief over loss, our joy during times of celebration, our fears over what the future might bring, etc... all of these experiences of man are expressed for us in this book to guide our prayer lives and worship.

Probably one of the types of psalms that makes most people uncomfortable is the imprecatory psalm. For example, Psalm 137 speaks of smashing the heads of babies of the people of Babylon for their oppression against the Hebrew people. How do we reconcile that with Jesus' instructions to love our neighbor. Be reminded that love of neighbor does not replace justice for wickedness and the Babylonians were wicked. The more important thing to note is that these imprecatory psalms are designed to be lifted to God in prayer or song and not to be acted upon. Thus they teach us how to express our anger and rage over injustice in a way that we can get it out of our systems and not become the monsters that our enemies happen to be.

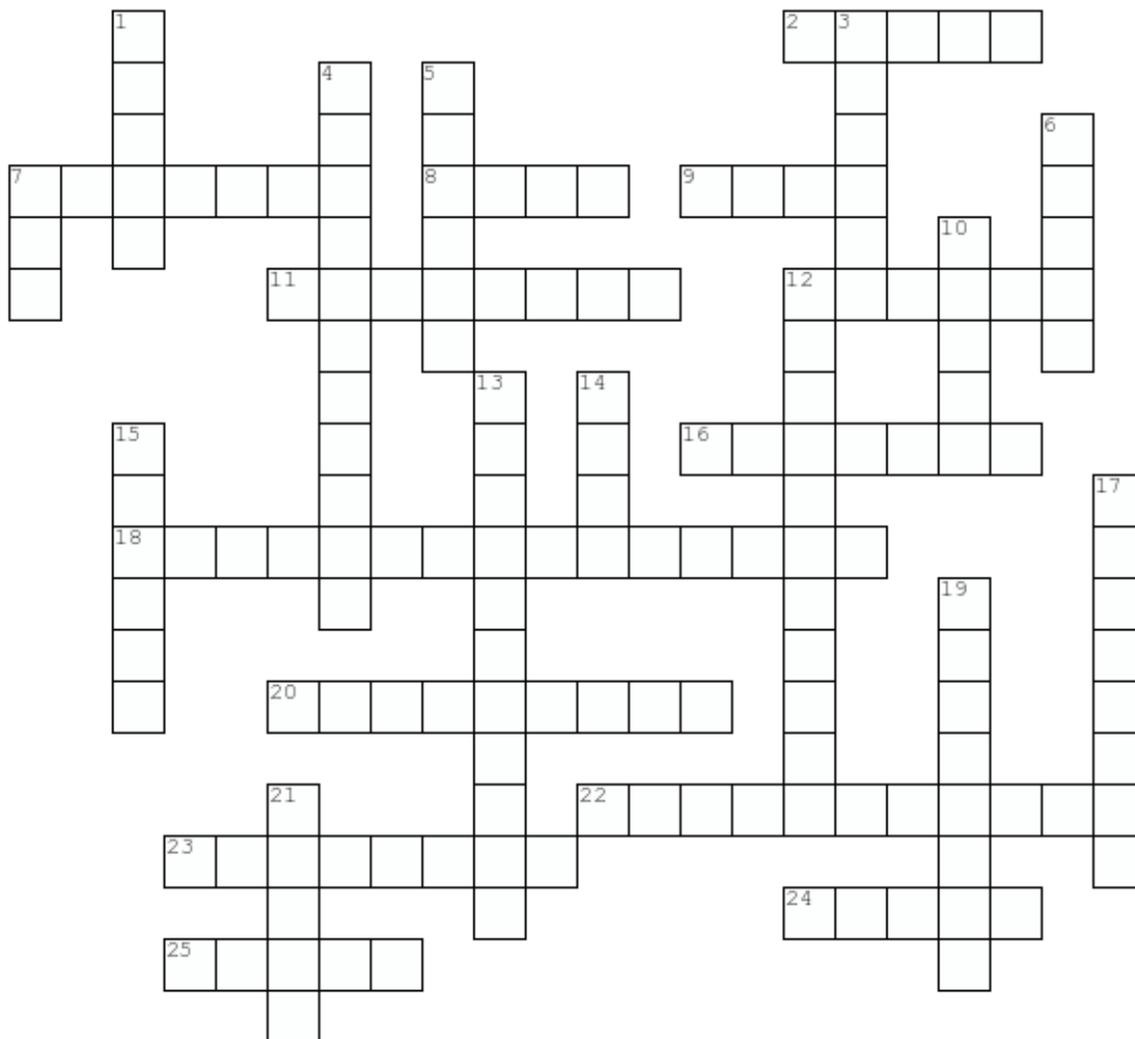
The most common type of psalm is the lamentation, a song lifted to God in the midst of great despair, but with the confident hope that God will hear the prayers and act upon them. Many of the Psalms contain Messianic prophecies. There are Psalms that are designed to be part of one's personal worship (see Psalms 5-8 for example) and there are some designed more for corporate worship (see Psalms 44 & 74 for example).

Psalms 113-118 are known as the "Egyptian Hallel" Psalms and are largely psalms of deliverance from bondage. These are also psalms typically sung in conjunction with Passover. Psalms 120-134 are known as "Psalms of Ascent" and are pilgrim psalms sung by the people as they "ascended the hills" on the way into Jerusalem for the celebrations during the year. Psalm 136 is known as "The Great Hallel Psalm" — a song crying out to God, giving him thanks for his creation and deliverance.

### Authors of the Psalms

As noted above, nearly half of the psalms are attributed to David. In addition to David, though, there are Psalms written by Solomon, Moses, the Sons of Korah, Asaph, and then Heman and Ethan the Ezrahites. All these are then compiled into the books we know as the Psalms.

## Weeks 19-23: Psalms



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### Across

2. Who is credited with writing most of the Psalms?
7. This son of David is also credited with writing two psalms.
8. '\_\_\_\_\_ for your house consumes me!'
9. How many books are there within the book of Psalms?
11. Psalm 150 functions as this to the book of Psalms.
12. The Psalms of \_\_\_\_\_ were ones sung by Pilgrims on the way into Jerusalem.
16. 'You turned my mourning into \_\_\_\_\_.'
18. There are 116 of these in the book of Psalms.
20. 'The Lord is my light and my \_\_\_\_\_, whom shall I fear?'
22. This is the most common type of psalm.
23. 'The Lord is my \_\_\_\_\_, I shall not want.'
24. Psalm 136 is known as the \_\_\_\_\_ Hallel psalm.
25. 'Create in me a clean \_\_\_\_\_, oh Lord, and renew a right spirit within me.'

### Down

1. 'Be \_\_\_\_\_ and know that I am God.'
3. 'For he will command his \_\_\_\_\_ concerning you.'
4. 'Open your heads, ye gates, lift up the ancient doors that the \_\_\_\_\_ may come in.' (3 words).
5. This is the Hebrew word, translated as 'Psalm' and which refers to a song sung to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument.
6. 'How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in \_\_\_\_\_.'
7. 'Kiss the \_\_\_\_\_, lest he be angry and you perish along the way.'
10. This son of Ezra and brother of Ethan wrote psalm 88.
12. This phrase closes the individual books within the psalms (3 words).
13. This kind of psalm speaks of the destruction of God's enemies.
14. 'Thy word is a \_\_\_\_\_ unto my feet.'
15. 'The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of \_\_\_\_\_.'
17. 'For a day in your courts is better than a \_\_\_\_\_ elsewhere.'
19. Psalms 113-118 are called \_\_\_\_\_ Hallel psalms.
21. We don't know for sure what this word means, but it is used 71 times in the Psalms and is probably a liturgical term.