

PSALMS 107-150

(Book 5)

The division of the Psalms into five sections (or books) is very ancient. They are Psalms 1-41, Psalms 42-72, Psalms 73-90, Psalms 90-106, and Psalms 107-150. Each section concludes with a doxology or psalm of praise. The last five Psalms of Book 5 begin "*Praise the Lord!*" Psalm 150 is a concluding doxology for the whole book. *Let everything that breathes, praise the Lord!*

The reasons for the divisions are lost in time. One possibility is that they were collected at five different time periods. This is impossible to verify, but some Psalms in this book are clearly from the time of the Exile. For example, Psalm 137 speaks of the experience of longing for Jerusalem while in exile in Babylon. *By the rivers of Babylon – there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion . . . how could we sing the Lord's songs in a foreign land.* Psalm 126 expresses the joy of return: *When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.*

Psalms 120-134 are associated with pilgrimages to Jerusalem for Passover and other festivals. They are called the Hallel Psalms or Songs of Ascents. They were traditionally sung as people drew near to Jerusalem and began to climb up to the Holy City. Jesus likely sang them as the twelve-year-old boy who traveled with his parents for the Passover (Luke 2:41-51). Certainly he sang them with the disciples when they came to Jerusalem the week before his death. Perhaps they were the psalms sung when they left the Last Supper and went to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. (Mark 14:26, Matthew 26:30)

Many Psalms in this last section have particular significance for us during Holy Week and Easter.

While Jesus was teaching in the temple during the days between his triumphant entry (which we celebrate on Palm Sunday) and the Last Supper, he quoted from Psalm 118:22 to predict his death

and resurrection: *The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing. It is marvelous in our eyes.* On Easter Sunday, we read Psalm 118:1-2, 15-24 together.

Other Psalms describe Jesus' experiences. Psalm 116:10-17, which is read on Maundy Thursday, includes these lines: *I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.*

Jesus, and later his disciples, quoted from the Psalms to show that He truly is God and that his ministry, death, and resurrection were prepared by God. On the day of Pentecost, Peter quotes Psalm 110:1 in his sermon: *"The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'"* Peter says that Jesus is the "my Lord" David references in Psalm 110:1. The people of Jerusalem crucified and killed Jesus, David's Lord and heir, the Messiah. But God raised Jesus from the dead. (Acts 2:34-35)

Book 5 contains the longest and shortest Psalms, which are also the longest and shortest chapters in the Bible. Psalm 117 has only two verses. Psalm 119 has 176 verses. The middle verse of the Bible is in Psalm 119. If you practice opening the Bible to the middle, you will usually open to Psalm 119.

Psalm 119 is an unusual Psalm. Most Psalms are prayers and hymns, which address God. Psalm 119 is a teaching Psalm. Each of its 22 stanzas explains why God's law is good and why it is important to study/live it. *Thy word is a lamp for my feet and How can young people keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word* are well-known quotes. (Verses 105 and 9) This Psalm is an alphabetic acrostic. Each stanza consists of either lines all beginning with the same Hebrew letter. Each Hebrew letter is used in alphabetic order.

The title PSALMS comes from the Greek term psalmos (Latin: psalmus). The Hebrew title is *Tehillim* which means praises. Hallelujah and Tehillim come from the Hebrew verb "to praise."