

BACKGROUND FACTS REGARDING THE PSALMS

HISTORICAL SETTING

The general historical setting for the singing and reciting of psalms was the temple in Jerusalem, designed by David and built by Solomon. But though most of the psalms share this general focus of temple worship, the specific historical backgrounds and settings for each of the 150 psalms are quite diverse.

THE TEMPLE AS THE CENTER FOR WORSHIP

The temple of Jerusalem and the psalms were closely related. In the temple was the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the covenant that God had made with Moses. That covenant was the means through which human beings reached upward in hope of redemption while God reached downward to fulfill that hope.

Although the temple was destroyed, the songs of redemption continued to be remembered and sung by the Israelites. And today in the church, which is the temple of the living God, those same songs still continue to express the pain, joy, and hope of all believers.

AUTHORS

The majority of the authors represented in the book of Psalms were associated with the temple. David headed the group that included various temple musicians who contributed other psalms. A large number of the psalms are anonymous.

DATE

The earliest psalm (probably Psalm 90), was probably written by Moses shortly after the Israelites left their bondage in Egypt (around 1446 B.C.). The latest psalm (probably Psalm 137) was written sometime during the Babylonian captivity (586-538 B.C.). All 150 psalms were collected into manuscripts sometime before the second century B.C.

PURPOSE

The book of Psalms was designed to aid in the worship of God by supplying poetic examples of life's ups and downs. Each event or struggle represented in the psalms is punctuated with the triumph and peace that can only be found through heartfelt praise to God.

GUIDING CONCEPTS

THE BACKGROUND OF THE USE OF PSALMS: THE COMMUNITY

The book of Psalms is the Bible's own hymnal. The contents are psalms that were used to praise God for personal and national wonders of redemption. The collection of psalms as it now exists center around the temple of God in Jerusalem.

King David was the first to organize the musicians in the temple and to incorporate psalms into Israel's temple worship. The psalms were designed to be sung as joyful songs (1 Chronicles 15.16), to praise the Lord (1 Chronicles 23.5, 30), and actually to prophesy through the words and music (1 Chronicles 25.1, 3). See 1 Chronicles 16.7-36 (which quotes Psalm 105.1-15), where David first assigned and organized the singing of psalms at the temple.

King Solomon used the psalms during the dedication of the temple (2 Chronicles 5.7-14). **Jehoshaphat** encouraged his armies through an exhortation of psalms (2 Chronicles 20.20-21). **Hezekiah** used the psalms of David and Asaph (2 Chronicles 29.30). During the great Passover of **Josiah**, the psalms of David were used (2 Chronicles 35.15). Even after the return of Israel from the Babylonian captivity, **Zerubbabel** celebrated the rebuilding of the foundation of the temple with psalms according to the directions of King David (Ezra 3.10-11). And when the rebuilt wall of Jerusalem was dedicated, **Nehemiah** had the priests sing psalms according to the command of David and his son Solomon (Nehemiah 12.27-29, 45-46).

THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE PSALMS

Divine Presence: The heart of God is seen in his desire to redeem the world. The relationship that is restored after the fall has to do with the divine presence. There is a covenant into which God has brought man. **Psalm 33.5; Psalm 30.5**

The Rule of God: The Psalms highlight God's rule, his enthronement. The Psalms were written during a period when his rule was marginally realized, when man was having the upper hand. So the Psalmist cries out and asks God to vindicate them. What is going on? God's name is the issue. Rule and God's very character are at stake. Rule is being cried out for. **Psalm 47.7-9**

Creation: There is a focus on Israel and then the focus moves out into the whole of creation. Psalm 65.5-7

Wisdom: A Grasp on Reality as a Whole (Psalm 1; 119)

Wisdom is seeing reality. Wisdom is seeing the world the way it really is from God's perspective, getting God's will done. The medium is different. The Psalms relate to the Kingdom of God not by saying anything new; what is new is the medium, the function within the communication and the detail. The Psalms are a detailed look at everyday life and give instructive words on how to deal with that life.