

Introduction to the Book of Psalms The Stone Edition (1996)

For nearly three thousand years, every situation in a Jew's life has been reflected in King David's Book of Psalms. . . In illness and in strife, in triumph and in success, the Jew opens his Book of Psalms and lets David become the harp upon which his own emotions sing or weep. . . Who can assess the worth of the little Book that has been the chariot bearing countless tears to the Heavenly Throne?

Upon reading of King David's many ordeals, one can begin to understand how he could compose the psalms that capture every person's joy and grief, thanksgiving and remorse, cries from the heart and songs of happiness. He was the Sweet Singer of Israel; more than that, however, he experienced the travail of every person, and that is why everyone can see himself mirrored in David's psalms.

Many of the psalms were composed to be sung by the Levites in the Temple, with musical accompaniment, and such psalms generally begin by naming the instrument upon which they would be played. Many of the psalms are attributed to authors other than David, but according to one view in the Talmud, he was the author of them all, presumably drawing upon ideas or texts and weaving them into his own compositions.

Whatever the authorship of the psalms, one thing is certain: Since the day it was composed, the Book of Psalms has become interwoven with the souls of countless Jews. The psalms are part of the daily prayers. They are recited at moments of illness and crisis. They are chanted joyously in times of good fortune and when heartfelt prayers have been answered. The last verse of the Book proclaims: "Let all souls praise God, Hallelujah!" The Sages expound homiletically that the verse also means to teach: "Praise God for every breath that you are privileged to take." This degree of gratitude that sees everything--even as automatic an act as drawing a breath--as a Divine gift is one of the countless teachings of David. It is the soul that permeates the entire Book of Psalms.

Psalm 1 -- The Book of Psalms begins by asserting that the keys to good fortune are to shun evil influences and to study the Torah.

Psalm 2 -- No matter how powerful the force, nothing can thwart God's will. Rashi comments that the psalm alludes to the encounter between the nations and the Messiah.

Psalm 3 -- Despite the apparent hopelessness of one's situation, trust in God will bring peace and security.

Psalm 4 -- When sinners abandon the deceptiveness of temporary glory and recognize the truth, they will repent and find true happiness.

Psalm 5 -- When beset by enemies, pray for deliverance, not merely to alleviate physical

suffering, but to be free to serve God without distraction.

Psalm 6 -- A prayer for when the community of individual suffers oppression and deprivation, sickness and distress.

Psalm 7 -- The righteous take heart in knowing that they will prevail over the wicked, while their enemies will fall victim to their own schemes.

Psalm 8 -- One with clarity of vision perceives God's handiwork everywhere and realizes that all man's accomplishments are His gifts.

Psalm 9 -- Despite their dazzling successes, the wicked will fade into oblivion; only the Godly will prevail.

Psalm 10 -- God punishes the wicked and champions the downtrodden.

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Psalm 12 -- Human friendship and loyalty are often suspect; but God's assurances are pure and enduring.

Psalm 13 -- Exile is like a long, dark, seemingly endless night.

Psalm 14 -- The entire world may have gone astray, but God will yet redeem His nation and Israel will rejoice.

Psalm 15 -- The way to come closer to God is to be generous and honest toward man.

Psalm 16 -- Talent and external forces are merely the Creator's tools in guiding history.

Psalm 17 -- The righteous person beseeches God to examine his deeds, to protect him from his enemies, and to allow him to enjoy God's glory.

Psalm 18 -- David earned the right to sing God's praises by perceiving the Divine hand in all the trials and triumphs of his long and varied career.

Psalm 19 -- Contemplation of nature and study of Torah will teach man to relate to God and to achieve spiritual fulfillment.

Psalm 20 -- God responds in times of distress.

Psalm 21 -- More than anyone else, kings and powerful people must set an example by acknowledging God's kindness.

Psalm 22 -- Speaking as an individual, the Jew prays for a final end to Israel's long exile

from its land and its Temple.

Psalm 23 -- Whether in a verdant meadow or a parched desert, God provides man's every need.

Psalm 24 -- More than the land, brick and mortar, only the personal qualities of the worshipers can build God's Temple.

Psalm 25 -- The righteous person seeks closeness to God and salvation from distress by repenting and extolling God's kindness to those who seek Him.

Psalm 26 -- A righteous person walks in purity and vigilance, and prays for Divine help in avoiding life's pitfalls.

Psalm 27 -- The House of God provides the sole island of constancy amid life's swirling waters of pain and disappointment. To dwell in it is David's constant goal.

Psalm 28 -- When He favors the righteous and rejects those unmindful of Him, God assists man in remaining on His chosen path.

Psalm 29 -- God's power and glory pervade all of creation. It functions solely according to His will, as has been manifested by His intervention in history.

Psalm 30 -- As darkness precedes dawn, so travail should be accepted as a prerequisite for success.

Psalm 31 -- David was relentlessly pursued, but always rescued. So too, we should entrust ourselves to God's mercy.

Psalm 32 -- God sends suffering and misfortune to help man reach the state of true repentance and its accompanying joy.

Psalm 33 -- Just as God created the physical world to function according to consistent laws, so His moral demands are constant and inviolable.

Psalm 34 -- David conquered despair by composing this alphabetical hymn, to show that our every faculty, from aleph to tav, should be dedicated to God.

Psalm 35 -- David appeals for help against friends turned traitors; so too, Israel in exile appeals against nations that repay Israel's contributions with oppression.

Psalm 36 -- Sin entices with false illusions; man can dispel them only with the objective light of truth.

Psalm 37 -- Do not be lured by the external trappings of prosperity of the wicked, for it is

God's blessed ones who will inherit the earth.

Psalm 38 -- Suffering must be recognized as chastisement for sin. One must repent and look to God for salvation.

Psalm 39 -- Suffering makes man aware of human frailty and transience. One should pray for the ability to devote oneself to Torah and mitzvos.

Psalm 40 -- A righteous person shows gratitude for God's help by affirming his allegiance to the Torah and proclaiming His wonders to the world.

Psalm 41 -- By contemplating the experiences of the poor and the sick, one becomes aware of God's loving closeness to man, even in the most hopeless circumstances.

Psalm 42 -- The exiled individual or nation calls longingly to God to be brought home.

Psalm 43 -- When God sends forth His light, the exiles will return to their land.

Psalm 44 -- Vividly portraying the recurring oppressions and persecutions of exile, Israel pleads for strength to endure until it is redeemed.

Psalm 45 -- A song of praise, describing the splendor and sovereignty of the king Messiah.

Psalm 46 -- In the upheavals of the Messianic era, God will shield Israel, as He shields all distraught people who seek His support.

Psalm 47 -- God's sovereignty will ultimately be recognized and accepted by all mankind.

Psalm 48 -- Jerusalem is eternally beautiful and glorious because God chose it for the abode of His Presence.

Psalm 49 -- Man should use his sojourn on earth to enhance his spiritual development and prepare for the World to Come.

Psalm 50 -- God desires not only external adherence to His commandments, but purity of spirit.

Psalm 51 -- David's psalm of remorse includes the principles of repentance. Thus, it is a fitting prayer for any penitent.

Psalm 52 -- Doeg's fate exemplifies the tragedy that results when one turns one's talents to evil.

Psalm 53 -- Alluding prophetically to the destruction of the land and the Temple, this

psalm also assures Israel's eventual restoration.

Psalm 54 -- Pursued by foes, one must pray for God's salvation.

Psalm 55 -- Despite the revolt of his son Absalom and the defection of his intimate friend and adviser Ahithophel, David was unwavering in his faith that God would enable him to prevail.

Psalm 56 -- Though his situation seemed hopeless, David's trust in God was unshaken, an attitude to be emulated by anyone in distress.

Psalm 57 -- Hotly pursued, his life in dire peril, David affirms his absolute faith in God.

Psalm 58 -- A prayer for the destruction of the violent oppressors in order that all may say, "God is the true judge in the land."

Psalm 59 -- Surrounded by Saul's men who were ordered to murder him, David prays that God rescue him, so that he may sing His praises.

Psalm 60 -- At the outset of his campaign against Israel's enemies, David expresses his faith in God's assurance that his reign would be consolidated from within and feared from without.

Psalm 61 -- David's personal experiences while fleeing into exile from his enemies parallel Israel's national experience.

Psalm 62 -- One must never allow the power and ill-gotten wealth of the oppressor to erode one's trust in God and faith in His justice.

Psalm 63 -- Though a victim of malicious slander, exiled from nation, family, and home, alone in a desolate wilderness, David never wavers in his love for God.

Psalm 64 -- When the enemy plots evil, sharpens its attack, and lays traps, one should take refuge in God.

Psalm 65 -- Calamities such as drought should spur mankind to repentance. God Who subdues the mightiest forces can revitalize the most parched land and withered nation.

Psalm 66 -- God's intervention in the affairs of man is not mere speculation; it is attested to by history, physically, perceptibly and irrefutably.

Psalm 67 -- A prayer for the arrival of the Messianic era, when all mankind will worship God and earn His blessing.

Psalm 68 -- Israel's triumph over the mightiest empires has been played out many times

throughout history. The phenomenon of Israel's triumph will be repeated for the last time with the Final Redemption, when God will be universally worshiped.

Psalm 69 -- A vivid prophetic portrayal of Israel's plight in its long and bitter exile, and an impassioned plea for its speedy deliverance.

Psalm 70 -- An appeal to God for rescue from one's enemies.

Psalm 71 -- Even in old age, when one's normal resources for contending with difficulty are diminished, one should turn to God Whose comfort never fails.

Psalm 72 -- An aged King David turns over his unfinished work to his son and prays for his success.

Psalm 73 -- It may seem that the wicked prosper, exempt from Divine punishment. However, a deeper and broader perspective reveals the emptiness and futility of their glamorous lives.

Psalm 74 -- From the agony of exile, the Jew prays that God will deliver His nation, thereby causing His sovereignty to be acknowledged by the entire world.

Psalm 75 -- A prayer for the ultimate Redemption, when God will bring about the collapse of evil, and the lasting elevation of Israel.

Psalm 76 -- A prayer for the time when people will realize the futility of rebelling against God, and will completely accept His mastery.

Psalm 77 -- When the chastisement of exile has fully purified His nation, God will again intervene as He did when He redeemed Israel from Egypt.

Psalm 78 -- God's love and concern for Israel are ever present. Failure to keep that memory alive is a major cause of sin, while remembering it brings solace in difficult times.

Psalm 79 -- A prayer that Israel be restored to its land, so that God's honor will be restored in the eyes of a doubting world.

Psalm 80 -- Recalling its earlier glorious relationship with God, Israel pleads for its restoration.

Psalm 81 -- No matter how low one has sunk, a firm resolve to heed God's word will cause Him to loosen the fetters and send Redemption.

Psalm 82 -- The maintenance of equity and justice is a prerequisite for the continued existence of the world.

Psalm 83 -- The historical enmity of the nations against Israel is an outgrowth of hatred for that which Israel stands for: the complete subordination of all human striving to God's will.

Psalm 84 -- Neither crushing persecution nor the blandishments of alien prosperity should deflect one from striving to attain closeness with God.

Psalm 85 -- As He had restored Israel and the Temple after the first Destruction, so may He again restore them, this time permanently.

Psalm 86 -- Wholehearted supplication, complete dedication, and awareness of God's closeness lift one's soul and bring it closer to God.

Psalm 87 -- Greatness and nobility emanate from Jerusalem, Israel's spiritual center.

Psalm 88 -- An impassioned plea for deliverance from Israel's long, almost unbearable, exile.

Psalm 89 -- Throughout its exile, Israel is sure that God will fulfill His promises to David.

Psalm 90 -- After portraying the brevity and fragility of man's existence on earth, Moses beseeches God to help man use his finite time properly and productively.

Psalm 91 -- By scorning conventional forms of protection and seeking refuge only in the Most High, the believer can live without fear of those who would harm him.

Psalm 92 -- On the Sabbath, free from the weekday struggle for a livelihood, the Jew can turn heart and mind to the perception of God's ways.

Psalm 93 -- In Messianic times, God's majesty and grandeur will be recognized by all.

Psalm 94 -- Goodness will prevail and evil will be punished. God will champion Israel's cause and deliver it from its enemies.

Psalm 95 -- Come acknowledge God as Creator and guiding force of the universe. Do not emulate your ancestors who strayed after falsehood.

Psalm 96 -- When all the nations on earth will recognize God's sovereignty, they will join in a new song acknowledging Him.

Psalm 97 -- After the upheavals that will precede the Messiah's coming, the world will recognize its folly, and God will reign supreme over the entire earth.

Psalm 98 -- A song of praise for the revelation of the final Redemption.

Psalm 99 -- Once the nations acknowledge His sovereignty, they will follow the dictates of righteousness that Israel has safeguarded throughout its history.

Psalm 100 -- A psalm to accompany the thanksgiving offering.

Psalm 101 -- The traits of purity and truth enable an individual to utilize his abilities for their intended purpose.

Psalm 102 -- A prayer for anyone beset by any misfortune.

Psalm 103 -- The soul in turmoil is calmed by recounting God's infinite kindness.

Psalm 104 -- A tribute to God for the wondrous world He has created and continuously sustains; a depiction of His unmistakable hand in nature.

Psalm 105 -- God guides the course of history; seemingly unrelated events were tied together to bring about a society of all mankind governed by God's holy Torah.

Psalm 106 -- God's presence and lovingkindness are always near; one need but have open eyes and an open heart to see them.

Psalm 107 -- Those who experience God's deliverance--from desolation, from captivity, from sickness, from the sea--must publicly proclaim their gratitude for God's enduring kindness.

Psalm 108 -- A prophetic psalm about the consolidation of the Messiah's reign.

Psalm 109 -- A plea to God for deliverance from scheming maligners who arise against the individual or the nation.

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Psalm 111 -- God created man with all that he needs, in body and mind, to perform God's will; but man must choose to embark on this path.

Psalm 112 -- One who truly fears God will fear no misfortune; he will be safe and secure in God's Providence.

Psalm 113 -- A psalm to God's control of creation and to His kindness to all creatures.

Psalm 114 -- Israel was elevated upon leaving Egypt; all of nature was overwhelmed by God's intervention.

Psalm 115 -- May God once again intervene in the affairs of man, so that the idolaters may know Him and become as imbued as Israel with faith in the true God.

Psalm 116 -- Israel declares its love for God despite its lowly state among the nations, and prays for the Redemption.

Psalm 117 -- [This psalm being of only two verses, the *Stone Edition* does not have a separate introduction for it.]

Psalm 118 -- Israel expresses gratitude and confidence as it looks forward to Divine Redemption from the straits of exile and oppression.

Psalm 119 -- An alphabetical arrangement--eight verses for each letter--that describes the ceaseless striving to faithfully live a Torah-true life regardless of time, place, circumstance or social environment.

Psalm 120 -- The first of fifteen "Songs of Ascents".

Psalm 121 -- A declaration of faith and a prayer for God's constant protection.

Psalm 122 -- A hymn to Jerusalem, the city where every visitor experiences an encounter with holiness.

Psalm 123 -- A Jew in exile yearns for God's succor.

Psalm 124 -- It is only God's care and protection that has saved Israel from extinction.

Psalm 125 -- Those who trust in God will be secure in His protection.

Psalm 126 -- Eventually God will return Israel to its land, rejuvenated in body and spirit.

Psalm 127 -- When God crowns man's efforts with success, he can raise his children to serve God.

Psalm 128 -- Only the righteous person and his family experience true bliss in both worlds.

Psalm 129 -- Israel's survival against all odds attests to God's providential control of its destiny.

Psalm 130 -- A person in distress prays to God from the depths of his heart.

Psalm 131 -- A righteous person is not arrogant.

Psalm 132 -- If one cannot complete a task, yet faithfully lays the groundwork, the final goal will be achieved in his merit.

Psalm 133 -- The idyllic unity among brothers brings God's blessings.

Psalm 134 -- Even in exile, Israel blesses God.

Psalm 135 -- God's continuing role in supervising and guiding history leads to the conclusion that all is futile except to serve Him.

Psalm 136 -- A song of God's creation and rulership of the world in general and Israel in particular.

Psalm 137 -- A prophetic lament over the exiles, and a charge to them to never remove Jerusalem from their hearts and minds.

Psalm 138 -- One must live with profound awareness that God is omnipotent and intimately close to those who seek Him.

Psalm 139 -- God's omniscience and omnipotence are absolute; He is aware of a person's innermost thoughts.

Psalm 140 -- A person who feels powerless to combat the working of deceit must place his trust in God.

Psalm 141 -- Even in crisis, one must pray not only for physical deliverance, but also for God's help in avoiding the slightest trace of sin.

Psalm 142 -- Utterly trapped, one places oneself completely at God's mercy.

Psalm 143 -- Sorely pained by persecution and suffering, one can be pulled from the abyss by recalling God's past miracles.

Psalm 144 -- David, the quintessential Jewish monarch, attributes all his accomplishments to God alone.

Psalm 145 -- Man is obligated to praise God's providential provision of the needs of every living creature.

Psalm 146 -- God is the One Who cares for the underprivileged and oppressed, despite the current ascendancy of our enemies.

Psalm 147 -- The Creator of the universe and all it contains will redeem and rebuild Jerusalem, from whence holiness and Torah emanate.

Psalm 148 -- All of nature--celestial and terrestrial--joins in a grand symphony of joyous songs of praise to God.

Psalm 149 -- The lofty praises uttered in honor of God will cut down the wicked and bring forward the glory of the righteous.

Psalm 150 -- Praise God in every way possible for all the manifestations of His greatness.