

## PSALMS 90-150

### Books Four and Five

#### BOOK FOUR (Psalms 90-106)

##### Psalm 90: God and time

This psalm, amongst other things, reflects on the relationship between God and time and the transience of human life. (See NAB for more.)

##### Psalm 91: God, my shelter

Often used for night prayer, this psalm images God with big wings in whom we can find shelter in times of danger. Much of the psalm hints at the story of the Exodus and wilderness wandering as it speaks of pathways, dangers, pestilence, tents, and serpents. As the psalmist sojourns along paths laden with dangers, the sole refuge is the Lord who *“will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge”* (Ps 91:4). (See NAB for more.)

##### Psalm 92: Hymn of thanksgiving to God for his fidelity

This is a psalm of profound rejoicing in the just and merciful God. (See NAB for more.)

##### Psalm 93: Hymn celebrating the kingship of God

(See NAB footnote for breakdown of psalm.)

##### Psalm 94: Prayer for deliverance

The psalmist laments to God for allowing the wicked and the arrogant to have the upper hand, leaving the faithful ones, the “righteous,” as victims. (See NAB for more.)

##### Psalms 95-100: Sing to the God of the universe

Psalms 93, 95-100 focus on the kingship of God. Each of them invites us to praise the King of creation. Psalm 100 is the introductory hymn in the Morning Prayer in the Psalter. The whole world is invited to enter the Temple of the Lord with praise and thanksgiving.

##### Psalm 101: Royal psalm

A Davidic king liturgically affirms his task of overseeing the justice of God in the kingdom.

##### Psalm 102: Prayer in time of distress

In this fifth of seven Penitential Psalms, the psalmist experiences emotional and bodily pain and cries out to God. Because his worldview is that God is the *cause* of all things, he assumes that God is the cause of his current pain. (See NAB for more.)

##### Psalm 103: “Thank you, God of Mercy.”

This is a psalm of thanksgiving to the God who is full of mercy for sinners.

##### Psalm 104: Hymn of praise to God

This psalm is a hymn of praise to God the Creator whose power and wisdom are manifested in the visible universe.

##### Psalm 105: Another hymn of praise to God

Like the preceding psalm, this didactic historical hymn praises God for fulfilling his promise to Israel. (See NAB for more.)

##### Psalm 106: “We sinned with our ancestors.”

This instructive historical psalm shows the sorrowful events in Israel’s history that resulted from their rebellion against God. (See NAB for more.)

#### BOOK FIVE (Psalms 107-150)

##### Psalm 107: God, our Savior in times of distress

This hymn invites those who have been rescued by God to give praise. (See NAB for more.)

##### Psalm 108: Prayer for victory

The words of this prayer for victory are found in two other psalms. Verses 1-5 correspond to Psalm 57:7-11 and verses 6-13 to Psalm 60:5-12. (See NAB for more.)

##### Psalm 109: “They curse but you bless.”

This has been called a ritual cursing psalm because it contains the longest listing of curses in the Psalter (6-12). C.S. Lewis, in his book *Reflections on the Psalms*, says: *“The absence of anger, especially that*

anger that we call **indignation** can, in my opinion, be a most alarming symptom suggesting a 'terrifying insensibility' and a 'total moral indifference.' In this psalm, the psalmist is cursing the unjust."

**Psalm 110: "Sit at my right hand."**

In this royal psalm, a court singer delivers three oracles concerning the king. They promise a place of honor with God, who triumphs over evil, divine sonship, and priesthood or mediation between God and people.

**Psalm 111: "Praise God for his great deeds."**

In this wisdom psalm, which is similar to Psalms 1, 19 and 119, the psalmist recites the blessings that come to those who remain close to God.

**Psalm 113: "Who is like the Lord our God?"**

This hymn exhorts the congregation to praise God. (See NAB for more.)

**Psalm 114: God's wonders at the Exodus**

This hymn celebrates Israel's escape from Egypt, and entry into the Promised Land.

**Psalm 115: "Where is your God?"**

This psalm is a response to pagans who ask: "Where is your God?" (See NAB for more.)

**Psalm 116: Thanksgiving psalm**

This is the heartfelt thanksgiving of a man saved from great danger. (See NAB for more.)

**Psalm 117: "All you nations, praise God!"**

The shortest psalm in the Psalter, it exhorts all nations to acknowledge the supremacy of Israel's God.

**Psalm 118: The One who comes in the name of the Lord**

The king and the people process into the Temple to give thanks to God after a victory.

**Psalm 119: "Your word is a lamp for my steps."**

On this longest psalm in the Psalter, *The Collegeville Commentary* states:

*In its great length and in its utilization of many psalmic genres – the blessing, the individual lament, the song of trust, the individual thanksgiving, the hymn – it is unparalleled in the bible. It is an anthology of poems praising the law. There are eight words for law in the psalm: way, lay, decrees, precepts, statutes, commands, ordinances, words. The poem expresses faith in the word of God delivered to the people in various situations, such as the inexperience of youth (vv. 9-16), pain (vv. 25-32), contentment (vv. 97-104), but mostly the situations of ordinary life. The singer stands for us all – people conscious of life's limits and wise enough to ask for the illuminating and strengthening hand of the Lord. (p.780).*

**Psalms 120-134: Songs of ascent (these 15 psalms begin with the title *Song of Ascent*)**

It is likely that the Songs of Ascent forms a collection of psalms which are sung when pilgrims go or "ascend" to Jerusalem.

**Psalm 120: Psalm of thanksgiving**

This psalm of thanksgiving is sung in the temple by a person who, like the author of Psalms 42-43, sojourns in a foreign land away from God's presence, the victim of liars and violent people (vv 5-7) (*Collegeville Commentary*).

**Psalm 121: "The Lord, my protector."**

This is a prayer blessing that can sustain us in the journey of life.

**Psalm 122: A pilgrim's prayer for Jerusalem**

This hymn is sung by pilgrims arriving at the gates of Jerusalem in obedience to the command of the Lord to gather in worship three times a year. The singer can scarcely contain his joy as he waits to join the procession into the court: "*We will go up to the house of the Lord*" (v.1). The splendor of the city is not simply its great buildings—Jerusalem is the place of encounter.

**Psalm 123: "My eyes are on the Lord."**

At a time when he feels attacked by his enemies, the psalmist expresses great confidence in the Lord.

**Psalm 124: “If the Lord has not been with us.”**

This is a communal psalm of thanksgiving for the Lord’s presence and protection against Israel’s enemies. (See NAB for more.)

**Psalm 125: Israel’s protector**

This psalm speaks of God as protector of his people.

**Psalm 126: “The Lord has done great things for them.”**

A mixture of lament and thanksgiving, this psalm was probably created after the Israelites returned to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon. (See NAB for more.)

**Psalm 127: “Unless the Lord builds the house ...”**

This psalm is a powerful reminder to families and parishes that everything in life is a gift and that we must live life totally relying on the Lord.

**Psalm 128: “Happy are they who walk in the ways of the Lord.”**

This poem is a statement of faith that our good and just God will always bless those who show him reverence.

**Psalm 129: The Lord’s rescue of Israel**

The psalmist looks back at how God has rescued Israel throughout her history.

**Psalm 130: Out of the depths**

This is one of the so-called seven Penitential Psalms in the Psalter. With a sense of deep sorrow for sin, the psalmist cries out to God, trusting in his great mercy.

**Psalm 131: Humble trust in God**

In this short psalm, the psalmist expresses great trust in God. He compares himself to an infant who trustingly rests in his mother’s lap.

**Psalm 132: My resting place forever**

This psalm accompanies a liturgical ceremony in which the Lord, invisibly present on the ark-throne, is carried in procession to the Temple.

**Psalm 133: Celebrating unity**

This psalm, which celebrates the blessing of unity in a family, echoes the words of Paul: “*Love one another with brotherly affection*” (Rom 12:10).

**Psalm 134: Night prayer**

Bertrand Bubby, S.M. writes: “*This liturgical psalm is the final song of the ascent songs. It is a call to praise and bless the Lord who is the maker of heaven and earth. This takes place in the night when the priests and Levites continued the praise and blessing of God while the people return home. The psalm is the second shortest in the Psalter; it is a beautiful conclusion for the set of 14 psalms of ascent*” (120-134).

**Psalm 135: “Praise the Lord, the Creator of Israel.”**

This hymn begins and ends with an invitation to praise God for choosing Israel and for being her protector throughout her history.

**Psalm 136: “His love is everlasting.”**

This is a song of praise to God for his unceasing manifestations of love toward Israel.

**Psalm 137: By the rivers of Babylon**

This psalm powerfully expresses the pain of the Jewish exiles in Babylon. Their captors mockingly ask them to sing one of their happy songs. Then the psalmist asks God to destroy the citizens of Edom and Babylon who ravaged Jerusalem and the Temple. The sentiments expressed in verses 8-9 scandalize us but they are the sentiments of a people whose land and holy places have been destroyed and terrorized. The psalmist, who knows nothing of the afterlife, calls on God to punish the people who destroyed their nation.

**Psalm 139: Our all-knowing and all-present God**

Commenting on one of the best known and reflective psalms in the Bible, the NAB says: “*A hymnic meditation on God’s omnipresence and omniscience. The psalmist is keenly aware of God’s all-knowing gaze (1-6), of God’s presence in every part of the universe (7-12), and of God’s control over the psalmist’s very self (13-16). Summing up 1-16, 17-18 express wonder. There is only one place hostile to*

*God's rule – wicked people. The psalmist prays to be removed from their company (19-24)” (p.139).*

**Psalm 140: Prayer for deliverance from lying tongues**

Like many other psalms, this lament stresses the power of the tongue as a killer and the powerlessness of humans against the violent, lying devices of evil-intentioned enemies. (See NAB for more.)

**Psalm 141: “Lead us out of temptation.”**

The psalmist prays that God will prevent him from joining the ranks of the unrighteous. *“Do not let my heart incline to evil or yield to any sin”* (4).

**Psalm 142: Prayer in time of agony and despair**

In this lament, the psalmist feels utterly alone and exhausted and may actually be in prison. (See NAB for more.)

**Psalm 143: “Teach me to do your will.”**

This is the seventh of the so-called penitential psalms used in a liturgical setting to guide the practice of repentance. In this intense prayer for deliverance, the psalmist is very downcast: *“My spirit is faint within me.”*

**Psalm 144: King's Prayer**

This royal psalm seems to reflect a ceremony at which the king, the leader of Israel's armies, asks God's help in national crises (vv 1-8). The tone of the poem in verse 9 shifts abruptly from pleading to thanksgiving, and then (verse 11 apart) shifts again to prayer for the well-being of the people. (See NAB for more.)

**Psalm 145: Song of praise to God**

In this prayer, the psalmist is filled with a deep sense of God's goodness.

**Psalm 146: “Keep trust in God, our Creator and Redeemer.”**

Psalm 146 is the first of five Hallelujah psalms that conclude the Psalter. These are all praise psalms. The psalmist urges his audience to praise God and rely on him who rules all, but at the same time warns against trusting mere mortals, no matter how powerful they seem. (See NAB for more.)

**Psalm 147: “Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving.”**

This hymn begins with the praise of praise itself. *“It is good to celebrate our God in song, how sweet to give him fitting praise.”*(See NAB for more.)

**Psalm 148: “All creation praise the Lord!”**

Based on the Genesis creation story (chs 1-2), this psalm invites all beings in heaven (1-6) and on earth (7-14) to praise the Lord. (See NAB for more.)

**Psalm 149: “Praise God with song and sword.”**

The distinctive feature of this psalm is that it seems to be a hymn of preparation for holy war waged by the people of God against the nations. Commenting on the psalm, Paschal Botz O.S.B. writes:

*In this Alleluia Psalm, praise and warfare stand side by side. It reminds us of Neh. 4:6-17, when the people rebuilt their city walls and gates with one hand and fought off the enemy with a sword in the other. At one and the same time they sang with dancing, while they warded off the foe in battle. They celebrated God as King and Creator in festive cult, when simultaneously they took vengeance on earthly enemies according to God's decree. A common faith and purpose knit the assembly of Israel together. Their purpose was to make sacrificial praise possible for all in a strong, peaceful city. The situation has not changed. (p.339)*

**Psalm 150: Final hallelujah**

This hymn of praise is the grand finale to the Psalter. Temple musicians and dancers are called to lead all beings on earth and in heaven in praise of God. One author calls Psalm 150 “the grandest symphony of praise to God ever composed for God.” This final doxology to the Psalter begins and ends with hallelujah.

**RESOURCES**

- The Collegeville Commentary – Old Testament
- Interpretation Commentary Series, Psalms, James Mays
- Runaways to God the Psalms on Prayer, Pascal Botz, O.S.B.
- With a Listening Heart – Biblical and Spiritual Reflection on the Psalms, Bertrand Buby, S.M.
- The Men and Message of the Old Testament, Peter Ellis, C.S.S.R