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Introduction to the Psalms

01 WHAT	02 WHO	03 WHEN	04 WHERE	05 WHY
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WHAT

◇ GENRE

- ◇ Poetry
- ◇ Hymnody

◇ THEMES

- ◇ Major: Joy/Thanksgiving; Lament
- ◇ Minor: Confidence/Trust; Remembrance; Wisdom; Kingship

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WHAT *(continued)*

◇ STRUCTURE: Anthology

- ◇ 150-ish Separate Compositions
 - ◇ Some Psalms have been separated that were originally together (9-10, 42-43)
 - ◇ Nonnarrative, Nonsequential
- ◇ 5 Books
 - ◇ 1-41; 42-72; 73-89; 90-106; 107-150
 - ◇ Possibly meant to mirror the Pentateuch
- ◇ Progression from predominantly laments to hymns

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WHAT *(continued)*

- ◆ HISTORICALLY ROOTED
 - ◆ Situated in ancient Israel
 - ◆ Immediate, contemporary context (writing, not reading)
 - ◆ Written for wide-ranging use
 - ◆ Truths, similarities, resonances, etc.
 - ◆ Tie into the wider Scriptural narrative
 - ◆ God and humanity
 - ◆ Fall into sin and call to repentance

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WHO

- ◆ BOOK AS A WHOLE
 - ◆ Anthology
 - ◆ Collected, composed, edited over the generations
- ◆ INDIVIDUAL PSALMS
 - ◆ Titles or Superscriptions (*Not included in the Book of Common Prayer*)

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WHO *(continued)*

- ◆ Psalm 90 (NRSV) – “A Prayer of Moses, the man of God”
- ◆ Psalm 42 (NRSV) – “To the leader. A Maskil of the Korahites” (Sons of Korah-RSV)
- ◆ Psalm 50 (NRSV) – “A Psalm of Asaph”
- ◆ Psalm 72 (NRSV) – “Prayer for Guidance and Support for the King: Of Solomon”
- ◆ Psalm 62 (NRSV) – “To the leader: according to Jeduthun. A Psalm of David”
- ◆ Psalm 23 (NRSV) – “A Psalm of David”

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WHO *(continued)*

◆ INDIVIDUAL PSALMS

- ◆ Titles or Superscriptions (*Not included in the Book of Common Prayer*)
 - ◆ David – 73
 - ◆ Asaph – 12
 - ◆ Sons of Korah – 11
 - ◆ Jeduthun – 4
 - ◆ Solomon – 2
 - ◆ Hemen, Etan, Moses – 1
- ◆ “*ℓ*” (Hebrew) = Of
 - ◆ By? For? About? In the style of?

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WHEN

- ◆ NO SINGULAR DATE
 - ◆ As a Collection/Anthology, not a singular composition
 - ◆ Psalms often historically non-specific, i.e. intended for continued use in worship of Israel
- ◆ HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PSALMS = HISTORY OF ISRAEL
 - ◆ Moses (Ps. 90), ~1525-1405 BC
 - ◆ David (Ps. 23), ~ 1010-970 BC
 - ◆ Post-Exile (Ps. 126), ~ 516 BC – 70 AD
- ◆ OPEN COLLECTION THROUGHOUT ISRAEL'S HISTORY

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WHEN *(continued)*

- ◆ Possibly open to adaption or rearrangement
 - ◆ Additions and edits by author, topic, compilers over time to fit current context
 - ◆ Ps. 69 is likely Davidic in origin
 - ◆ Verses 34-36 likely added later: 34 Let heaven and earth praise him, the seas and everything that moves in them. 35 For God will save Zion and rebuild the cities of Judah; and his servants shall live there and possess it; 36 the children of his servants shall inherit it, and those who love his name shall live in it.
 - ◆ More at home in the post-exilic era
 - ◆ Ps 72:20 – “The prayers of David son of Jesse are ended.”
 - ◆ Likely end of one version or section of the Psalms at some point in Israel's history
 - ◆ BUT, there are Davidic Psalms after Psalm 72

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WHERE

- ◇ WILDERNESS BETWEEN EGYPT AND THE LAND OF CANAAN
- ◇ CANAAN, Pre- and Post-Conquest
- ◇ KINGDOM(S)
 - ◇ United: Israel
 - ◇ Divided: Judah and Israel
- ◇ EXILE: Babylon, Judah, Israel
- ◇ POST-EXILE: Judah, Israel, Diaspora(?)

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WHY

- ◇ PRAYERS: Prayerbook/Hymnal of Israel
 - ◇ Words addressed to God rather than the word of God addressed to Israel
 - ◇ Privately by Individuals and Corporately in Public Worship
 - ◇ Utilized in the various times of life: Joy, Sadness, Anger, Thanksgiving, Meditation, etc.
 - ◇ Pilgrimage (Songs of Ascent): Ps. 120-134
 - ◇ Great Doxology: Ps. 146-150
 - ◇ Specific events spur on the writing of hymns, songs, poetry without the specifics necessarily known to those who find use/connection in using/singing them
 - ◇ It is well with my soul

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WHY *(continued)*

◆ ISRAEL'S THEOLOGY

- ◆ Not explicitly a Systematic/Dogmatic Theology; Not a Catechism
- ◆ Yet so extensive that it is a microcosm of the whole of the Old Testament
- ◆ Expression through Hymn and Poetry
 - ◆ Illustrates the divine-human encounter, with emphasis on the human response
 - ◆ Imagery: Shepherd, Warrior, Father, Mother, King, Husband, etc.
 - ◆ Covenant: Abraham, Moses, David
- ◆ Topics Addressed (include, but not limited to): Zion, History, Law, Kingship, War

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WHY *(continued)*

◆ APPLICATION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE CHURCH

- ◆ Luke 24:44 – “Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.”
- ◆ Most quoted book of the Old Testament, alongside Isaiah
- ◆ Prophetic, broadly speaking
 - ◆ Humanity: Son of Man; Son of David; Davidic/Kingship Psalms
 - ◆ Jesus in the line of David
 - ◆ In Israel the king is to reflect the kingship of God, ruling by divine decree, particularly David
 - ◆ Divinity: Psalms offered to God include the 2nd Person of the Trinity, the Son of God, and thereby are rightly ascribed to Jesus

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