

TITLE

The title of this book in the Hebrew Bible is Tehillim, which means "praise songs." The title adopted by the Septuagint translators for their Greek version was Psalmoi meaning "songs to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument." This Greek word translates the Hebrew word mizmor, which occurs in the titles of 57 of the psalms. In time, the Greek word psalmoi came to mean "songs of praise" without reference to stringed accompaniment. The English translators transliterated the Greek title, resulting in the title "Psalms" in English Bibles.

WRITERS

The texts of the individual psalms (excluding the titles) do not usually indicate who wrote them. Psalm 72:20 seems to be an exception, but this verse was probably an early editorial addition, referring to the preceding collection of Davidic psalms, of which Psalm 72, or 71, was the last.¹ However, some of the titles of the individual psalms do contain information about the writers. The titles occur in English versions after the heading (e.g., "Psalm 1") and before the first verse. They were usually the first verse in the Hebrew Bible. Consequently, the numbering of the verses in the Hebrew and English Bibles is often different, the first verse in the Septuagint and English texts usually being the second verse in the Hebrew text, when the psalm has a title.

When we experience chastening from the LORD for disregarding Him, we should return to him in prayer. If we appeal to Him for mercy, so that we may change our ways and continue to glorify Him, He may grant us restoration. This deliverance should then lead us to rededicate ourselves to praising Him more consistently the rest of our lives.¹

"Every difficult experience of life—and David had many of them—is an opportunity to have a 'pity party' or attend a rehearsal for singing in the choirs of heaven! We have a lifetime of grace (v. 5) to prepare us for an eternity of glory."²

PSALM 31

This lament-thanksgiving (or lament-trust) psalm grew out of an experience in David's life in which his foes plotted to kill him. That incident reminded David that the LORD would protect those who trust in Him. He urged others who might encounter similar affliction to love and trust in God as well. Perhaps David composed this psalm when, after defending the town of Keilah, its inhabitants proved ungrateful and would have delivered David to Saul (1 Sam. 23). What David wrote here would fit that occasion.

1. David's cry for rescue 31:1-2

Because David was trusting in the LORD, he called on Him to defend him. He could do this because God had promised to aid those who looked to Him for help in troubling times (e.g., Deut. 28:1-14). David used many figures of speech that picture God as a secure fortress in these verses. (Verses 1- 3 also appear in 71:1-3.)

"The Hebrew concept of shame ["Let me never be put to shame," v. 1] is ... less an emotion or feeling than a situation of public condemnation and approbation [approval]."³

"We generally put our ear near to the lips of the sick and dying that we may hear what they say. To this the text appears to allude ["Incline Your ear to me," v. 2]."¹ "If God be our strength, we may hope that he will both put his strength in us and put forth his strength for us."² "Psalm 31 provides an illustration of one man's response when the bottom dropped out of his life."³

2. David's confidence in God's love 31:3-8

The psalmist's confidence, that the LORD would protect him, was strong.

31:3-4 David believed God would free him from his present entangling problems because the LORD had promised to help the righteous in their afflictions (cf. 71:1-3). This is another scriptural "rock song"—a song that compares the LORD to a rock.

31:5 David committed his life to God's care. He did so confidently because God had faithfully delivered him in the past and had proved true to His promises. The Lord Jesus prayed the first line of this prayer on the cross (Luke 23:46) as did John Hus (c. 1373-1415 A.D.), the Czech reformer and martyr.⁴ We should also follow this example in our times of suffering (1 Pet. 4:19).

"... Martin Luther said, 'Blessed are they who die not only for the Lord, as martyrs; not only in the Lord as believers, but likewise with the Lord, as breathing forth their lives in the words, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.'"⁵ "Many think that while they are perplexed about their worldly affairs, they may be excused if they neglect their souls; whereas the greater hazard

our lives and secular interests lie at the more we are concerned to look to our souls, that we may keep possession of our souls when we can keep possession of nothing else, Luke xxi 19. "1

31:6 The opposite of trusting in Yahweh is putting confidence in an idol, a vain object of hope, whatever that object might be (cf. Jon. 2:8).

31:7-8 Even though the psalmist had not yet experienced deliverance, he delighted in the faithfulness of his God. God had not handed him over to his enemy, so the prospects for the future were encouraging. Even though final deliverance was yet to come, David could praise God as he waited for it, since he believed that God would be faithful to His promises to help His afflicted. Paul and Silas sang praises to God in the Philippian jail with the same confidence (Acts 16:25).

3. David's lament over his danger 31:9-13

In the preceding verses, David appealed to God's righteousness. Now he appealed to His mercy. David recounted some of the reasons he needed God's help. Among other things, he admitted his own sins were partly responsible for his sufferings (v.10). Mainly it was the opposition of evil people that accounted for his distress. They had resisted, slandered, and schemed against him. He felt alone in standing for what was right.

"Such swallow-friends the world is full of, that are gone in winter."2 "

"In the psalmists' world the righteous and the wicked do not peacefully coexist in the name of pluralism. Rather the wicked marshal all their cunning and power in an effort to annihilate the righteous (31:13; 56:5-6; 71:10; 143:3)."3

"When the psalmist describes the misery in which he finds himself he does so because he rightly believes that the Lord is

much interested in the well-being of His children. A statement of their wretchedness will touch His heart. There may be something naive about this—the assumption that the Lord does not know what the situation is unless we tell Him. But if one carries that approach through logically, a person would never present a petition to God: why tell Him; He knows? Here the trusting confidence of the child of God speaks out of the necessity that is upon men to get relief of their distress by uttering it."1

"Dim and sunken eyes [v. 9] are plain indicators of failing health."2

3. David's prayer for deliverance 31:14-18

Reaffirming his trust in the LORD, David called on Him to silence his enemies and to save him from their hateful hands. He asked God to shut their slanderous mouths also. "My times are in Your hand" (v. 15) means that whatever happens to me is under God's providential, careful control.

"... not more surely does the moon sway tides than God sways souls."3

"Many people go to fortune-tellers and have their palms read. They are told that this line means this and another line means something else. All of it is perfect nonsense, but it affords a living for some people; and for others who are trying to get rid of money it provides another way of getting rid of it. But our times are in Christ's hands."4

"The last two verses of the section offer what is commonly described as an imprecation or curse upon the enemies of the author. To pray for the overthrow or the just punishment of the wicked is not wicked. It is generally a vigorous desire that the iniquity of evil men might be brought to an end. A number of arguments could be offered to show that these Old

Testament saints would have far preferred to see the conversion of these their enemies (cf. the close of Ps. 2); but since, in most cases, this was out of the question, they prayed earnestly that God would put an end to their ungodly career and so to the harm that they sought to bring upon the godly."¹

4. David's praise of God 31:19-22

The psalmist next extolled Yahweh for His goodness to those who seek refuge in Him.

"The sentence employs both the verb *str* ('hide, conceal') and the noun *seter* ('hiding place') to describe not just a shelter but a place of concealment from the psalmist's besieging troubles."²

"I find that people like to talk about their neighbors or their children or their father and mother or relatives or their boss or their preacher, but not many people like to talk about the goodness of God. My, how good He is! When was the last time you told someone how good God is?"³

God protects those who seek refuge in Him from evil conspiracies and verbal attacks. The LORD had been faithful to David under attack. The reference to the besieged city (v. 21) could be figurative or literal.

"To him Ziklag was indeed the turning-point between his degradation and exaltation."⁴

Even though David's faith had faltered, God still supported and saved him.

"In this part [of the psalm] well-grounded hope expands to triumphant certainty ..."⁵

159 6. David's exhortation to the godly 31:23-24

David urged those who hope in God to love Him purposefully, because He is faithful to save the godly. He wanted to encourage others as they waited for Yahweh's salvation.

What about the godly who have perished at the hands of evil oppressors? Our lives do not end when we die. In the light of New Testament revelation we know that God will vindicate the righteous after death if He allows us to fall before the wicked in this life. When David lived, he had the promises of the Mosaic Covenant that guaranteed the godly long life in the Promised Land (e.g., Exod. 20:12; et al.). God will vindicate the godly who die prematurely—after death (Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2; 2 Cor. 5:10).

In view of God's consistent faithfulness to His promises to bless the righteous and punish the wicked, the godly can endure periods of persecution and suffering with strong confidence. We can trust in the LORD's eventual deliverance and even praise Him as we endure rough times

"In this song we find the seasons of the soul as we know them all sooner or later. First, autumn with its winds and gathering clouds, yet having sunlight and a golden fruitage even though the breath of death is everywhere (1-8). Then follows winter, chill and lifeless, full of sobs and sighing (9-13). After that the spring with its hope and expectation and its sweeping rains and bursting sun gleams (14-18). At last the glad and golden summer (19-24). We need them all to complete our year!"¹

PSALM 32

In this psalm of wisdom and thanksgiving, David urged those who sin against the LORD to seek His pardon, with the encouragement that He is gracious with the penitent. He will, however, chasten the unrepentant.

Different scholars have identified different psalms as wisdom psalms. Bullock regarded 32, 34, 37, 47, 73, 112, 127—28, and 133 as wisdom psalms. Some literary distinctives of wisdom psalms are proverbs, admonitions (often taken from nature), similes, and the words "blessed,"