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***Cultural Context***

***The Psalms***

***Who/When/What***

The title, Book of Psalms, comes from the Greek interpretation of the Hebrew title “Tehillim” or praises. The book, which served as a prayer and hymn book in the Temple and synagogues, can be divided into five sections (possibly to mimic the five books of the Torah). Each of the five sections is marked by a concluding doxology (41:13; 72:18-19; 89:52; 106:48; and 150). When and by whom the five books were compiled into the one book we have today is not fully understood. Nonetheless, they were purposefully arranged in a manner that helps further interrupt their message.

The individual psalms are credited to several authors: King David is said to have written over half of the Psalms. The individual headings credit one psalm to Moses (90), two to King Solomon (72 & 127), one each to Ethan (89) and Heman (88), the Ezrahites, and 23 psalms are credited to the Asaph and Korah families (worship leaders). Fifty psalms are not designated to a specific author.

**Why**

Though the Psalms are divided into five sections, it is indeed one book with an introduction (Psalm 1 & 2) and a conclusion (146 - 150). The introduction sets the theme for the entire book: Blessed is the man who “delights in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night” (1:2). The Psalmist begins this book of Wisdom with a clear choice. There are two paths a person can take – he can “walk in the counsel of the wicked” (1:1) or faithfully respond to God’s written Word. The choice is ours to either choose Wisdom or reject it. The Psalms are intentionally designed to help the reader focus and structure his life around the Wisdom of God. Psalms 1 & 2 guide our interpretation of the entire book.

**Genre**

It is vital to remember the way we read the Bible is dependent upon the type of Genre it represents. The book of Psalms is considered religious poetry. More succinctly, the book consists of the following significant themes: individual prayers for help (13), corporate prayers for help (44), songs of thanksgiving (107), hymns (145), songs of instruction (25), and laments (89).

Hebrew poetry does not incorporate rhythm and meter the way modern poetry may. The primary device used by Hebraic poetry is parallelism. There are three types of parallelism incorporated: synonymous (two lines that carry the same meaning), antithetic (two lines are contrasted), and synthetic (the second line builds upon or develops the first line)

The Psalms are the “praise and proclamation and prayer of those who believe that the confession, ‘The Lord reigns’ states the basic truth about the world and life lived in it.” Our response to that truth, how we live within His Kingdom, is defined by the Psalms – “because ‘the Lord reigns,’ human beings may and must praise in wonder and joy, pray in dependence and gratitude, and practice the piety of trust and obedience.” Nonetheless, we live in a world filled with conflict to God’s sovereignty. Those in opposition to God are those who are enemies of God’s people. The faithful, those who fear the Lord, are “guided by trust in and loyalty to the Lord as God and king” (Psalms, James Luther Mays). Our choice is set before us in the Psalms – we can align ourselves with the people of God (and thereby be blessed) or with the enemies of God (and thereby be judged by the Sovereign God).