

Week 2. Book 1 (Psalms 3–41): David's reign

Last week, we looked at the structure of the Psalms and the introductory pair:

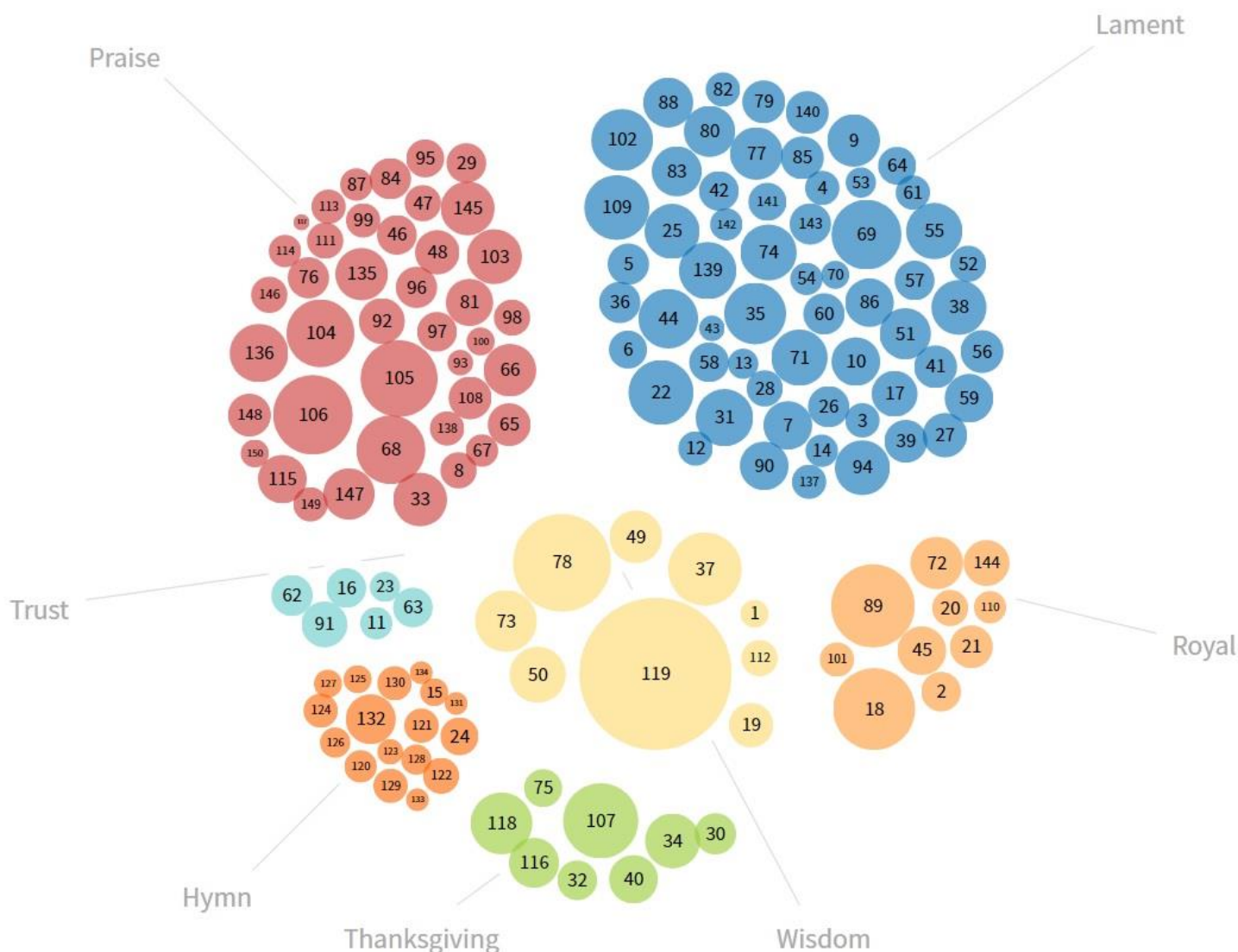
- The Psalms are arranged in **five books**, to tell Israel's story.
- Psalm 1 taught the people to pay attention to *the Law of the LORD*, for the Torah established Israel as God's nation.
- Psalm 2 declared the authority of *the LORD and his anointed*, for the Davidic king represented the reign of his Father in heaven.

Any thoughts or questions from last time?

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Genres in the Psalms

Before we look at specific psalms tonight (Psalms 3 and 22), it will help if we can recognize the different kinds of literature that make up the Psalms:



Source: David Witthoff et al, *Psalms Form and Structure*. (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2014).

Can you tell from the chart which is the largest category?

The genres in the Psalms are:

- **Laments** present problems to God when things aren't working right (59 psalms).
- **Praise** psalms bring honour to the LORD (41).
- **Hymns** celebrate the character of God (17).
- **Royal** psalms (like Psalm 2) celebrate the king who represents God's reign (10).
- **Wisdom** psalms (like Psalm 1) call God's people to walk in his ways (9).
- **Thanksgiving** psalms celebrate what God has done for his people (8).
- **Trust** psalms declare their reliance on God's faithfulness (6).

The psalms we're looking at tonight are both laments, and both are "of David."

Psalm 3: David's enemies

Psalm 3 (NIV)

A psalm of David. When he fled from his son Absalom.

¹ LORD, how many are my foes!

How many rise up against me!

² Many are saying of me,

"God will not deliver him."

³ But you, LORD, are a shield around me,

my glory, the One who lifts my head high.

⁴ I call out to the LORD,

and he answers me from his holy mountain.

⁵ I lie down and sleep;

I wake again, because the LORD sustains me.

⁶ I will not fear though tens of thousands assail me on every side.

⁷ Arise, LORD! Deliver me, my God!

Strike all my enemies on the jaw;

break the teeth of the wicked.

⁸ From the LORD comes deliverance.

May your blessing be on your people.

What do you do with a psalm like this? In Australia, most of us don't live in fear that many enemies are trying to kill us.

Do you skip over psalms like this, searching for something more relevant? You can find more positive psalms, but you can't escape the *enemies*. They're everywhere! (Psalms 5:8; 6:7, 10; 7:4-6; 8:2; 9:3, 6; 10:5; 13:2, 4; 17:7, 9; 18:3, 14, 17, 37, 40, 48, etc.)

What's the point? Why do I need to know this? How does it help? To make sense of the psalm, ask what it meant in its setting first, before we ask what it means to us.

Who was the person facing all these enemies? (Hint: see above verse 1.)

We already met the enemies in this introductory psalm:

Psalm 2:2-3 (NIV)

² The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the LORD and against his anointed, saying,

³ "Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles."

David was the LORD's anointed king on earth. His enemies were trying to grasp the authority God gave him, trying to capture God's people into their own power. The enemies are prominent in the Psalms because earth is at war with God: rejecting divine sovereignty, God's appointment of his anointed.

In Psalm 2, the enemies were the kings of other nations. In Psalm 3, it's more insidious. Who is the enemy named in the title of Psalm 3?

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2 Samuel tells the story of David's reign. He fought battles against other nations, until *the LORD gave him rest from all his enemies* (2 Samuel 7:1, 9, 11). Then he discovered that his enemies included his own people, his own house. Absalom was David's son:

2 Samuel 15:10, 14 (NIV)

¹⁰ Absalom sent secret messengers throughout the tribes of Israel to say, "As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpets, then say, '**Absalom is king.**'" ...

¹⁴ David said to all his officials who were with him in Jerusalem, "Come! **We must flee, or none of us will escape from Absalom.**"

The title of Psalm 3 tells us how the Jewish people understood this psalm. When they compiled the Psalter after the exile, the kingdom had died. It died not just because of the avarice of foreign empires but because God's own people rebelled against God's sovereign authority. David had always faced this problem.

So, the first time we hear David's voice in the Psalms, it's about the rebellion against God's anointed, from within his own family. This was what brought the kingship down.

The prophets never say, "The kingdom fell because the foreigners were too powerful." They always say, "The kingdom fell because we rebelled against the LORD and pursued foreign gods." God rescues from foreign powers, but what hope is there when the enemies of God's reign are in his own household?

So, Psalm 3 works at multiple levels, a reality that spans the generations:

- It is the story of David's own son taking the kingship from him, exiling him and his people from Jerusalem. It's Absalom taking God's people into his power.
- It's also the story of later enemies taking the kingship from David, exiling his people from Jerusalem. It's Babylon taking God's people into their empire.
- It's what happened to Jesus too. His enemies—from God's house—handed the King of the Jews over to their enemies to be put to death.

The enemies of God's anointed are not incidental in the Psalms. The rebellion against God's reign is the sin of the world. This is the problem God must deal with if God is to save his people and restore his reign to the earth.

This is at the heart of the whole Bible narrative. It's what the anointed king (the Christ) said when God raised him up:

Luke 24:44 (NIV)

“This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the **Psalms**.”

Please don't skip over the Psalms that discuss enemies. Read them as the core story: the enemies of God's reign. Pursue the question of how God is restoring his reign to earth through a son of David, his Anointed.

Psalm 3 was not predicting Jesus, his crucifixion, or his resurrection. But Jesus was the anointed king, facing the enemies of God within Israel as well as the nations, entering into the death of the kingship on behalf of his people.

Can we reread the Psalm that way?

Psalm 3:1-2 (NIV)

¹ LORD, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me!

² Many are saying of me, “God will not deliver him.”

Can you imagine what people were thinking as they watched Jesus' crucifixion? Peter? Mary? The soldiers? The leaders of his own people? (Hint: Luke 23:35.)

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Psalm 3:7-8

⁷ Arise, LORD! Deliver me, my God!

Strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked.

⁸ From the LORD comes deliverance. May your blessing be on your people.

David's prayer was answered when God raised his anointed from the dead. That's when God broke the teeth of the powers that held God's people captive.

In fact, the resurrection unseated the power of death, the power that had been destroying humanity since Cain killed Abel.

The resurrection of God's Christ is how God has brought *deliverance* for the earth. The *blessing* of God's reign over his people was restored as the resurrected son ascended the throne.

How does that reading of Psalm 3 sit with you? Discuss.

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“Of David”

Our next psalm is also titled, “Of David.” Let’s discuss what this means before we go on to Psalm 22. Does it mean the psalm was written by David, or about David, or what?

Our technology focuses us on writing. It started with the printing press, the publishing industry, education, encyclopedias, newspapers, and magazines. IT (information technology) and the Internet are now in the hands of every child. So, when we read, “Of David,” we think of a writer. That’s not how Hebrew society functioned in Old Testament times.

Titles were added to the Psalms by the compilers who assembled them after the exile. The titles help us to recognize whose voice we’re listening to, rather than whose pen wrote it. “Of David” means the psalm is to do with the Davidic king.

Hebrew culture was more corporate than individual. God promised the kingship to David forever, but David didn’t live forever. In Hebrew thought, “David” was still reigning in Solomon, in Rehoboam, in whoever was king in each generation.

So, when the kingship finally fell, they asked, “Lord, where is your former great love, which in your faithfulness you swore to David?” (Psalm 89:49) God promised to raise up “my servant David” to reign over them (Ezekiel 34:23-24; 37:24-25; Jeremiah 30:9; Isaiah 55:3). “David” means the God-appointed kingship that came through David. (It’s a metonym, like saying, “Canberra promised there would be no recession,” where Canberra means the Australian government.)

This is important if we’re to understand the Psalms. We read, “The LORD is my shepherd” today, and we respond with a warm, fuzzy feeling, like, “I am his little lamb.” That’s okay, but it misses the point the Davidic king was making. He was saying, “I am not the top dog.” *Shepherd* was a kingship term in the Ancient Near East, and he was recognizing his place as an under-shepherd of the Great Shepherd.

The David reigning in each generation needed to do that. Every one of them needed to say, “YHWH is my shepherd; I shall not want.” But the under-shepherd is not saying, “I’m a wealthy king.” He’s saying, “I have all God’s resources at my disposal.” When the king says, “He makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside quiet waters,” then the nation is at peace. God’s provision and peace come to the nation because the king recognizes the LORD as his shepherd.

When the compilers added “Of David” to a Psalm, they wanted us to recognize that we’re listening to the voice of the Davidic king—not just the original David, but the David of each generation.

And that’s how we find Jesus in the Psalms. He was the David to come.

Would you like to discuss that before we look at another psalm of David?

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Psalm 22: David's "defeat"

Now that we've understood that "Of David" refers to the Davidic kings who were God's anointed throughout the generations (not just the one individual from the tenth century BC), we're ready to approach Psalm 22.

You may be familiar with the opening words:

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

These were the words on Jesus' lips at his crucifixion (Matthew 27:46 || Mark 15:34). But before we ask why Jesus reused the opening words of Psalm 22, what did those words mean in their Old Testament setting?

Psalm 22:title-2 (NIV)

*For the director of music. To the tune of "The Doe of the Morning."
A psalm of David.*

¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish?

² My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, but I find no rest.

There were many times in the history of Israel when the Davidic king lost a battle. His return to Jerusalem was not the procession of a conquering lion; it was the bleating of a timid doe.

In his defeat, David turns to the authority he represents. He complains to the God who forsook him, despite his cries of anguish as he prayed for God to save him (verse 1).

But his present disaster is not the only thing David knows. He knows this enduring reality too:

Psalm 22:3-5 (NIV)

³ Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the one Israel praises.

⁴ In you our ancestors put their trust;
they trusted and you delivered them.

⁵ To you they cried out and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

God's eternal sovereignty remains intact, even in the face of David's present pain.

Meditate on that for a moment. What will you do when you're suffering?

Will you open up to God about how you feel, like David did in the first two verses?

Will you recognize God's enduring authority as David did in verses 3-5?

How does this lament help shape your response when life is bad and your prayers have not been answered?

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We think life is made up of happy times versus sad times. Truth is, we often feel both at once. Trauma and trust run side by side, like two rails of a train track.

That's how Psalm 22 is structured: two interwoven truths:

Tragedy

David is defeated (vv. 1-2),

David's agony consumes him (vv. 6-8),

David feels like he's dying (vv. 11-18),

Trust

but God is reigning (vv. 3-5).

but his life is God-given (vv. 9-10).

but he trusts God to rescue him (vv. 19-31).

The lament psalms ask us to honestly voice both the trauma of our tragedy, and our trust in God's faithfulness. Can you do both at once? What's your experience?

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David uses poetic imagery to voice the tragedy of his defeat. His enemies are beasts: *bulls* surrounding him (verse 12), *lions* ready to have him for dinner (verse 13), a pack of *dogs* that have pinned him down (verse 16).

The language of crucifixion (22:14-18)

But in the words that David uses to voice his agony, we can hear a bigger story.

Psalm 22:14-15 (NIV)

¹⁴ I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint.

My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me.

¹⁵ My mouth is dried up like a potsherd,

and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;

you lay me in the dust of death.

Crucifixion had not been invented yet, but it's hard to imagine a more apt description:

- The bones of a man hanging on a cross are literally *out of joint*.
- Gasping for air, *thirst* takes over and *the tongue sticks to the roof of the mouth*.

Did the Holy Spirit give David words that meant more than he knew?

What about this?

Psalm 22:16-18 (NIV)

¹⁶ Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me;

they pierce my hands and my feet.

¹⁷ All my bones are on display;

people stare and gloat over me.

¹⁸ They divide my clothes among them

and cast lots for my garment.

Who did this happen to? Many descendants of David felt this way, including Josiah, the last good king of Judah who was killed in a battle with Pharaoh Necho. Josiah's death became an enduring lament for the death of the kingship (2 Chron 35:20-25).

Then came the anointed king who was born in David's town (Bethlehem) to restore the kingdom, the king of the Jews who was handed over to his enemies to be crucified. Was King David's trauma his experience also?

Jesus was the David of his generation. With "King of the Jews" emblazoned above his head, God's anointed said, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Matthew (27:46) and Mark (15:34) make that connection with Psalm 22. John does too:

John 19:23-24, 28 (NIV)

²³ This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.

²⁴ "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it." This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said, "They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment." [Psalm 22:18]

²⁸ Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." [Psalm 22:15?]

Was John right to see Jesus' crucifixion in the light of the enemies of God's reign? Was Jesus right to identify his crucifixion at the hands of Rome with David's defeat by his enemies?

How does any of this help us approach the Psalms?

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The divine rescue (22:19-31)

David anticipated that God would ultimately rescue him. He vowed to "declare your name in the assembly" that gathered around the king (Psalm 22:22).

The New Testament applies this to Jesus also:

Hebrews 2:11-12 (NIV)

So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. ¹² He says:

"I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters;
in the assembly I will sing your praises." [Psalm 22:22]

When God rescued his Son from death, we were also raised up in him. The community raised up in him is the kingdom of the king, and the family of the Father. That makes us brothers and sisters of the Son, in his Father's family. We're citizens of his kingdom, the *assembly* that gathers around the king (Psalm 22:22, 25).

That's what the church is: the *assembly* that gathers around the king. The Septuagint uses the word *ekklesia*, normally translated "church" in the New Testament.

So here is the mission of the church—the assembly that gathers around the resurrected and ascended king—as defined by the Davidic king:

Psalm 22:25-31 (NIV)

- 25 From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly [*ekklesia*];
before those who fear you I will fulfill my vows.
- 26 The poor will eat and be satisfied;
those who seek the LORD will praise him—may your hearts live forever!
- 27 All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations will bow down before him,
- 28 for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations.
- 29 All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;
all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—
those who cannot keep themselves alive.
- 30 Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord.
- 31 They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it!

Your thoughts? How does this help us understand our place as the brothers and sisters of the king? How does it define our mission as the assembly (church) implementing the government of our heavenly king in his earthly realm?

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What's in Book 1?

When you're ready to read the other psalms in Book 1 (Psalms 1–41), these are the genres:

- lament (22): Psalms 3-7; 9-10; 12-14; 17; 22; 25-28; 31; 35-26; 38-39; 41.
- royal (4): Psalm 2; 18; 20-21.
- thanksgiving (4): Psalms 30; 32; 34; 40
- praise (3): Psalms 8; 29; 33
- trust (3): Psalms 11; 16; 23.
- wisdom (3): Psalms 1; 19; 37
- hymn (2): Psalms 15; 24

They're all "Of David," except for Psalm 33 and the introductory pair (Psalms 1–2).

Since so many of David's psalms are laments, could we describe the king as *the suffering servant of the LORD*, carrying in himself the sufferings of God's people?

The New Testament quotations from Book 1 outnumber any other book of the Psalms:

- Psalm 2 Acts 4:26; 13:33; Hebrews 1:5; 5:5; Revelation 2:27; 19:15
- Psalm 4:4 Ephesians 4:26
- Psalm 5:9 Romans 3:13
- Psalm 8 Matthew 21:16; Hebrews 2:8; 1 Corinthians 15:27
- Psalm 10:7 Romans 3:14
- Psalm 14:1-3 Romans 3:12
- Psalm 16:8-11 Acts 2:28; 13:35
- Psalm 18:49 Romans 15:9
- Psalm 19:4 Romans 10:18
- Psalm 22 Matthew 27:46 || Mark 15:34; John 19:24; Hebrews 2:12
- Psalm 24:1 1 Corinthians 10:26
- Psalm 32:1-2 Romans 4:8
- Psalm 34 1 Peter 3:12; John 19:36
- Psalm 35:19 John 15:25
- Psalm 36:1 Romans 3:18
- Psalm 40:6-8 Hebrews 10:7
- Psalm 41:9 John 13:18

Response

We covered two laments tonight. Are laments helpful, or do you just want happy psalms? What have you learned about the laments from these two Psalms? Are you okay with being this honest with God?

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We found Jesus in the Psalms because often we're listening to David's voice, the voice of the king anointed by God. How are you feeling about this way of recognizing Jesus in the Psalms? What questions do you still have?

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Next week we move on to Book 2. We'll encounter a worship song (**Psalm 48**), and see David's kingship enduring in his son (**Psalm 72**). Please read these two psalms in preparation.