The Psalms are emotional. At times, God speaks too, but most of what we read are man’s words directed toward heaven. All these words are completely inspired by God. Our issue is to determine how they function as God’s Word for us. The Psalms are not:

• doctrinal teaching - No!
• biblical commands on our behavior - No!
• illustrations of biblical principles - No!

They provide examples of how people expressed themselves to God (rightly or wrongly). They give us pause to think about (1) God, and (2) our relationships to God. They ask us to consider the “ways of God.”

**Exegesis of the Psalms**

Separate them by types. Understand their different forms and their different functions.

The New Testament contains 287 Old Testament quotes. 116 are from Psalms. The 150 Psalms were written over a period of about 1000 years. Moses wrote Psalm 90 in 1400B.C. Ezra wrote Psalm 1 and Psalm 119 about 444 B.C. Our task is to view the Psalms through the lens of Salvation History.

**“Selah”**

The Psalms are poetry and songs. The music is lost to us. “Selah” was intended to signal a musical pause. It’s not necessary to read it out loud. It’s a signal to pause and meditate.

Though the Psalms are different from each other, they all emphasize the spirit of the Law, not the letter. Do not use them to form doctrines, independent of New Testament writings.

The Psalms are emotional poetry. They often exaggerate through the emotions of their writers. The language is picturesque. It often contains parallelisms, as do the Prophets and Wisdom. Exegesis of the Psalms requires us to simplify the language. Much of Psalms is not intended to be literal absolutes. An example is Psalm 51:5. Does this mean that the author’s mom was fornicating or in adultery? Or does it point to her sin nature? Be
careful to guard the poetic nature of the psalms when looking for exegetical truth. Look for metaphors when studying Psalms. The language is full of images that may not be meant to be taken literally. Do not start grazing on a hillside because Psalm 23 refers to us as sheep!

**The Psalms as Literature**

1. Each Psalm is characterized by its form (how it’s put together).
2. Each type of Psalm was intended to have a specific function in the life of Israel. For example, the royal psalm was intended to be sung at the crowning of a king.
3. Find the literary patterns. Look for repetition, play on words, and acrostics.
4. Don’t take the psalms apart; and, don’t connect them, even though some seem to be continuations or repetitions.

**The Use of Psalms in Israel**

3 New Testament Epistles give us examples of the proper use of Psalms.
1. Psalms will fill you spiritually. (Ephesians 5:18b-19)
2. Psalms express joy to the midst of suffering. They also express thanksgiving for blessings.
3. Psalms are models for devotion.
4. Psalms are models of ethics. The words “righteous” or “righteousness” occur 130 times in 150 Psalms.
5. Psalms contain messianic prophecies.
6. Psalms help us worship; and open the door for God to work in our lives (Acts 16:25).

**The Literary Outline of the Psalter**

There are five books. It is difficult to say exactly how the Psalter should be divided. Here is a reasonable guess:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book I</th>
<th>Psalm 1 – 41:13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Book II</td>
<td>Psalm 42 – 72:20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book III</td>
<td>Psalm 73 – 89:52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book IV</td>
<td>Psalm 90 - 106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book V</td>
<td>Psalm 107 – 150:6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Verse 20 declares David’s prayers are ended.
Psalm 90 was written by Moses.
Last words: “Praise the Lord.”
Each book ends with a doxology (praise to God). The Psalter is not arranged chronologically. It is arranged topically.

**Types of Psalms**

**Lament Psalms**
There are more than 60. They may be divided into individual and corporate Lament Psalms. Their purpose was to help a person or group express their struggles to God.

**Thanksgiving Psalms**
These are the opposite of Lament Psalms. They are found in both six groups called communities (65, 67, 75, 107 124, 136), and ten individual psalms (18, 30, 32 etc.)

**Hymns of Praise**
These were written for public worship to God.

**Salvation History Psalms**
These celebrate God’s saving work among Israel (and of course, among us). They are found in Psalms 78, 105:15, 106, 135, 136.

**Psalms of Celebration and Affirmation**
(This group contains four sub-groups).

1. **Covenant Renewal Liturgies**
   Often called Davidic Covenant Psalms. Their purpose was to bring people back to God (It’s certainly relevant for today!).

2. **Royal Psalms**
   Examples: Psalms 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, etc. Their subject was the king. They could be either Lament or Celebration Psalms.

3. **Enthronement Psalms**
   Examples: Psalms 24, 29, 47, 93, and 95-99. These may have double meaning: earthly or heavenly enthronement. They may have been used in yearly celebrations.

4. **Songs of Zion or Songs of the City of Jerusalem**
   Examples: Psalms 46, 48, 76, 84, 87 & 122. These songs have special application today to the New Jerusalem of the Book of Revelation.

5. **Wisdom Psalms**
   Examples: Psalms 37, 37,49, 73, 112, 127, 128 (and Proverbs, Chapter 8). Unlike the other psalms, these teach wisdom and practical instruction.

6. **Songs of Trust**
   Examples: Psalms 11,16, 23, 27, 62 etc. These Psalms point to the absolute trustworthiness of God.
Exegetical Sampling of Psalms

**Psalm 3 (A Lament Psalm)**

(Psalms 3 NKJV) “LORD, how they have increased who trouble me! Many are they who rise up against me. {2} Many are they who say of me, "There is no help for him in God." Selah {3} But You, O LORD, are a shield for me, My glory and the One who lifts up my head. {4} I cried to the LORD with my voice, And He heard me from His holy hill. Selah {5} I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustained me. {6} I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people Who have set themselves against me all around. {7} Arise, O LORD; Save me, O my God! For You have struck all my enemies on the cheekbone; You have broken the teeth of the ungodly. {8} Salvation belongs to the LORD. Your blessing is upon Your people. Selah”

This Psalm is a great example of the need to read the entire Psalm to get its meaning correct. You cannot stop at the first two verses without thinking David has no hope. However, if you continue to read, you see his hope is in God.

2. What are the figures of speech?
3. Notice the use of Selah at the ending verse. What are we signaled to reflect upon?

**Psalm 142 (A Lament Psalm)**

(Psalms 142 NKJV) “I cry out to the LORD with my voice; With my voice to the LORD I make my supplication. {2} I pour out my complaint before Him; I declare before Him my trouble. {3} When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, Then You knew my path. In the way in which I walk They have secretly set a snare for me. {4} Look on my right hand and see, For there is no one who acknowledges me; Refuge has failed me; No one cares for my soul. {5} I cried out to You, O LORD: I said, “You are my refuge, My portion in the land of the living. {6} Attend to my cry, For I am brought very low; Deliver me from my persecutors, For they are stronger than I. {7} Bring my soul out of prison, That I may praise Your name; The righteous shall

Find the elements of this Lament Psalm:

1. **Address**
   Verses 1, 2

2. **Complaint**

3. **Trust**

4. **Deliverance**

5. **Assurance**
   Verse 7b

6. **Praise**
“I will praise You with my whole heart; Before the gods I will sing praises to You. {2} I will worship toward Your holy temple, And praise Your name For Your lovingkindness and Your truth; For You have magnified Your word above all Your name. {3} In the day when I cried out, You answered me, And made me bold with strength in my soul. {4} All the kings of the earth shall praise You, O LORD, When they hear the words of Your mouth. {5} Yes, they shall sing of the ways of the LORD, For great is the glory of the LORD. {6} Though the LORD is on high, Yet He regards the lowly; But the proud He knows from afar. {7} Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me; You will stretch out Your hand Against the wrath of my enemies, And Your right hand will save me. {8} The LORD will perfect that which concerns me; Your mercy, O LORD, endures forever; Do not forsake the works of Your hands.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thanksgiving Psalm</th>
<th>Find the elements of this Thanksgiving Psalm:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Psalms 138 NKJV)</td>
<td>1. Introduction of proclamation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Distress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Appeal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Deliverance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Testimony or public acknowledgment of God’s work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imprecatory Psalm (“Kill them, Lord!”)</th>
<th>These Psalms are intended to redirect our anger through/to God. They are often found in the midst of Lament Psalms. To “imprecate” means to invoke a curse upon one’s enemies.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Psalms 137:7-9 NKJV) “Remember, O LORD, against the sons of Edom The day of Jerusalem, Who said, “Raze it, raze it, To its very foundation!” {8} O daughter of Babylon, who are to be destroyed, Happy the one who repays you as you have served us! {9} Happy the one who takes and dashes Your little ones against the rock! (Psalms 10:15 NKJV) “Break the arm of the wicked and the evil man; Seek out his wickedness until You find none.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

surround me, For You shall deal bountifully with me.”