

Introduction to Psalms, and to Book IV

God has divided His Word, the Bible, into two parts the **Old Testament and the New Testament**. The Old Testament is divided into 39 books and the New into 27. There are 69 books in the Bible which are specifically named. These books have been divided into chapters and verses by men as a convenience in referring to and locating specific scriptures. Godly men have also classified books of the Bible into various categories based upon their similarities in content or purpose. Four major categories easily recognized in the Old Testament are the Pentateuch, the Historical Books, the Prophets, and the **Poetic** books. The five Poetical Books are Job, **Psalms**, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs.

The **Book of the Psalms** is different from other books of the Bible. Its 150 Psalms are arranged in a specific order and numbered by God through the Spirit. They are part of the inspired Word of God, who moved the various writers in writing them and others in compiling them. He arranged them in five separate Books of unequal size. The Psalms in each Book have been collected and placed in their order by inspiration. Many of the Psalms have titles at their head. Some of the titles name the writer and sometimes the occasion for its creation. These titles are part of the inspired scripture as well and should be read as part of the Psalm. Many Psalms were written (sung) by David. Other poets are named but we assume many untitled psalms were written by him, but perhaps not all. Some Psalms seem to be connected and some naturally follow the previous one. Many are dedicated "to the Chief Musician" whom we may think of ultimately as Christ Himself who leads our praises, Psalm 22:22. Some Psalms are clearly part of a designated series, such as the fifteen marked "Songs of Degrees" or

"Songs of Ascents," (Psalms 120 - 134). Others have similar titles such as the psalms that are labeled Maschil ("instruction"). Students of the scriptures agree that certain Psalms speak prophetically of the Lord Jesus. They are classed as "messianic" but that term isn't inspired and doesn't occur in the titles. Psalms 2, 26, 22, 23, 24 etc. for example clearly speak of the Messiah. Others have passages that make us think of the Lord Jesus as well, even though the whole Psalm may not be focused upon Him.

The individual Psalms are not simply chapters of a book but each stands alone as a Psalm in its own right. (When referring to a Psalm, for instance Psalm 22:4, one should refer to it as "Psalm 22, verse 4" not as "Psalms chapter 22, verse 4".) As with other Bible passages verse numbering in a Psalm is not inspired. However sometimes it reflects obvious divisions in the poetry. On the other hand, Psalm 119 has 22 marked subdivisions named by the 22 letters of the Hebrew Alphabet. In some other Psalms the first word in each verse begins with a succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. While this is evident to those who can read the original language (Hebrew) the effect is lost in translations. Some include notes telling the reader of these interesting features. These probably served as an aid to memorization while marking the ingenuity of the poet and enhancing the interest and beauty of the song.

Book IV of the Psalms includes Psalms 90 through 106. Some think the five Books of the Psalms reflect the different characters of the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch. If so, Book IV should reflect the path and progress of the believer in the wilderness as does the book of Numbers.

By Ron Canner, April 2, 2008