



## Summary of Psalms 90-106

### Psalm 90 - A Prayer of Moses, the man of God.

This community lament has some unspecified disaster as its background and asks God to have pity on his people and bless them. The title, which ascribes the psalm to Moses, invites the singing congregation to picture Israel around the time of Deuteronomy, as they were about to cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land. Their parents had followed Moses out of Egypt, through the parted Red Sea – and yet they rebelled, so that God swore that they would not enter the land; refer to Numbers 14:20-36. For the Israelites to accomplish their mission and for God to establish the work of their hands would require that the people embrace the covenant and live in faith toward God. Those who sing this should see themselves as the heirs of that generation, seeking like them the blessing of God so that they can carry out their mission.

This psalm stresses time and how it passes, as can be seen from the various time words throughout: days and years; this is seen through the description of God as eternal and unchanging in all generations, for he is from everlasting to everlasting. The awareness of how short human life is leads to earnest prayer for God's help, without which his people can accomplish nothing of lasting value.

This psalm is the basis of the familiar hymn, 'O God, Our Help in Ages Past.' The title points to this lament as a prayer by 'Moses, the man of God,' which is confirmed in Deuteronomy 33:1 and Joshua 14:6. Generally, the OT uses the expression 'man of God' for a prophet, e.g. 1 Samuel 2:27 and 9:6, 1 Kings 12:22, 13:1 and 17:18, and 2 Kings 4:7. Moses was, of course, a prophet par excellence.

### Psalm 91

This tender and intimate psalm describes the confidence that the believer may have through all manner of dangers and challenges. The psalm speaks about the faithful person as 'he', addresses him directly as 'you' singular, and gives him words to say as 'I'. Some have suggested that all of these are Israel speaking as a

whole, but the situations in view in the psalm, e.g. pestilence, terrors by night and arrows, and one's fellows falling, are those primarily faced by particular individuals. Of course, Israel as a whole finds refuge in God and is covered by his divine wings, but the nation's members see this in their individual lives as well.

### Psalm 92 - A Psalm. A Song for the Sabbath Day.

This is a hymn of thanks and praise to God, specifically celebrating the blessing of the Sabbath institution in Israel. The Sabbath was a day of rest and a day for gathered worship, and worship is the focus of the psalm. Besides the title, 'A song for the Sabbath', features that display this specific focus include the references to morning and evening worship, to the musical instruments used in worship, and to the temple.

### Psalm 93

Psalms 29, 93 and 95-99 are hymns of praise for divine kingship, namely, God's kingly rule over creation. The idea of God as universal king is of course rooted in the creation account; the specific words first appear in the Song of Moses: <<***The Lord will reign for ever and ever***>> (Exodus 15:18).

When the OT speaks of the kingship of God, it can mean his kingship over all creation, or it can mean God's acknowledged kingship over his people: <<***and the Lord said to Samuel, 'Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them'***>> (1 Samuel 8:7), <<***But when you saw that King Nahash of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, "No, but a king shall reign over us", though the Lord your God was your king. See, here is the king whom you have chosen, for whom you have asked; see, the Lord has set a king over you. If you will fear the Lord and serve him and heed his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God, it will be well; but if you will not heed the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then the hand of the Lord will be against you and your king***>> (1 Samuel 12:12-15); the NT expression 'kingdom of God' focuses on the way God ministers to and governs his people through the heir of David: <<***But he said to them, 'I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose'***>> (Luke 4:43). In each case, it is important to discern which of these is primarily in view. The psalms of divine kingship especially celebrate God's kingship over his creation. Even though it is important to distinguish these ideas, one should not separate them: it is Israel's great privilege that the God who rules over them is the universal Creator and Lord, who one day will rule all nations. Psalm 93 ends with this experience of wonder. The conviction that God reigns is the ultimate antidote to doubt and despair; refer also to Psalm 89:38-51.

## Psalm 94

This is a community lament, for a time when the wicked not only exult but also oppress the faithful, many of whom are socially weak, doing so with no fear of God. The song asks God to take action to protect the faithful. At the same time, it strengthens the pious to endure this oppression without losing heart or going over to join the wicked; it does this by recounting God's exhaustive knowledge of all that people think, do, and say; by remembering God's steadfast love for his own; and by rejoicing in God's righteous commitment to bring justice by caring for the weak and putting down the wicked. Thus the godly can view their current circumstances as God's discipline, even while they pray for deliverance.

The wicked in this psalm are members of God's people who in their hearts do not believe in the God of the covenant. They seem to have political power, or at least influence with the ruling authorities, which enables them to crush the faithful. Although such wicked persons are in one sense members of the covenant people, they are distinguished from God's true people or heritage and will suffer the full force of God's judgement.

It puzzles scholars why this psalm is placed here, interrupting the sequence of divine kingship psalms (Psalms 93 and 95-99). Perhaps the simplest explanation is that God's powerful kingship guarantees his final victory over all who oppose him, even if they are members of his own people who ought to have acknowledged his rule! It is always worth being on God's side.

## Psalm 95

This psalm summons those singing it to learn the lesson from the rebellion of a previous generation and to commit themselves to faithfully heeding God's voice. This psalm can be called a prophetic hymn like Psalm 81, which also remembers Meribah, and Psalm 82, as it echoes themes found in the OT Prophets; or it can be called a historical psalm like Psalm 78, as it draws a lesson from the history of Israel. There is a fine line between the two categories.

The combination of Meribah and Massah shows that the psalm draws its lesson from the Israelites' grumbling against Moses because they had no water; refer to Exodus 17:1-7. At the same time, this event did not lead to God's decisive oath found in the psalm. That oath comes in Numbers 14:21-35, after the people had listened to the report of the ten faithless spies and refused to enter the land to take it. The Lord swore <<*as I live*>> that not one of those who grumbled in disbelief <<*shall come into the land*>>; the 40 days of spying would yield 40 years of wandering. That is, those who refuse in unbelief to obey God's voice would be removed from the people, and there would be a delay in the people carrying out their calling to occupy the land.

The psalm takes the incident at Meribah and Massah as an early instalment of this persistent unbelief, which culminated in refusal to enter the land. The psalm has two parts: the first a celebration of God's kingship and the privilege that his people enjoy as they worship him (vv.1-7a), and the second a warning not to repeat the rebellion of their ancestors (vv.7b-11). The first section explains why the psalm appears with Psalms 93-99, and also serves to highlight the folly of any kind of rebellion in the face of such an astounding privilege. Hebrews 3:7-11 uses vv.7b-11, placing its audience in an analogous situation to the Israelites in the wilderness: for these Jews to abandon their explicit faith in Jesus in order to return to the safety of 'ordinary' Judaism would be like the rebellion of Israel in the wilderness, a mark of unbelief. As in the psalm, Hebrews makes every day a 'today' that calls for renewed faithfulness.

### Psalm 96

This is a hymn celebrating how God's kingship over all creation means that all kinds of people should love and worship him. The psalm has three sections, each beginning with a command, i.e. 'sing,' v.1; 'ascribe,' v.7; and 'say,' v.10, and each mentioning the Gentiles, i.e. 'all the earth,' 'the nations,' and 'all the peoples' in vv.1-6; 'families of the peoples' and 'all the earth' in vv.7-9; and 'the nations,' 'the peoples,' 'the earth,' and 'the world' in vv.10-13.

God called Israel to be a vehicle of blessing for all mankind, bringing them knowledge of the true God for whom all human beings yearn, and this psalm keeps this mission prominent in the Israelites' view of the world and their role in it. Verses 8-9 even call the Gentiles to join Israel in their worship in God's courts.

The psalm looks forward to a time when the Lord will come and judge all peoples with equity, without specifying how this will take place. The term 'judge' is probably not limited to sifting between the righteous and the unrighteous; the wider sense of 'execute justice, rule justly' fits the context better: <<**He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more**>> (Isaiah 2:4), and: <<**His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked**>> (Isaiah 11:3-4). Thus the psalm is more focused on a time in which Gentiles acknowledge the true God, and the benefits that will bring to all the earth, than it is on the final judgement. Christians sing this, knowing that God has ushered in this long-awaited epoch with the resurrection of Jesus. This psalm appears in 1 Chronicles 16:23-33, indicating that the people sang an adaptation or perhaps an early edition of it when David brought the ark to Jerusalem.

## Psalm 97

Psalm 97 continues in the theme and tone of the surrounding psalms. It uses phrases many found in other psalms or passages from the Hebrew Scriptures. This is a hymn celebrating God's kingship over all his creation (refer to the comment made on Psalm 93), particularly focusing on how God's universal rule assures the faithful of his final victory over evil and idolatry. This victory involves God's protection of his faithful ones from evildoers, the vindication of Zion as God's chosen place for revealing himself, and the Gentiles ultimately coming to know the true God. Such assurance does not come from observing the course of events in the world, as God's universal kingship is often invisible; it is an affirmation of biblical faith that produces profound joy in those who embrace it.

The psalm has a number of echoes of the Pentateuch, especially Exodus: e.g. v.1 ('the Lord is king' or 'the Lord reigns') and Exodus 15:18; vv.2-5 and Exodus 19:9, 19:16, and 19:18 (God's appearance at Sinai); v.6 and Exodus 16:7 ('behold his glory') and: <<***all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord***>> (Numbers 14:21b); and v.9 and Exodus 15:11 (the Lord is exalted far above all other gods).

The reference to Zion hearing and being glad in v.8 indicates that the psalm arose from some great deliverance of the city, although the particular deliverance in view is not clear.

## Psalm 98 - A Psalm.

This hymn celebrates God's universal kingship by referring to the marvellous things and salvation that God has worked in the sight of the Gentiles, on behalf of his people. The flow of thought is straightforward: God has worked salvation, i.e. rescue from evil for Israel, which all the ends of the earth have seen; all people in the earth should join Israel's celebration, because God is their rightful king, too; the material creation should join all mankind in jubilant praise of the one true God, as they look forward to his rule.

There are many overlaps with Psalm 96, as in the opening invitation; the interest in the Gentiles; the rejoicing of the material world; and the Lord as universal judge. This psalm lies behind Isaac Watts' famous hymn 'Joy to the World.' The psalm and the hymn have come to be associated with Christmas; like Psalm 96, this is not inappropriate provided it is clear that the coming of Jesus as the Davidic king who will bring light to the Gentiles is what establishes the connection.

## Psalm 99

This is another hymn celebrating God's kingship over all his creation, this time focusing on his exalted holiness and the wonder that he has made a way for his people to come into his presence without danger. Although the emphasis falls

specifically on God's covenant people, Israel, the element of universal hope for the Gentiles is also present: vv. 2-3 express the wish that 'all the peoples' might praise the great and awesome name of the Lord.

### Psalm 100 - A Psalm of thanksgiving.

This hymn, though not explicitly a psalm celebrating God's kingship, brings the collection of kingship hymns to a close with its exuberant call to come before the Lord in worship. Like the divine kingship psalms, this hymn invites 'all the earth', i.e. all the Gentiles, to join the song of praise.

The title declares that this psalm is for giving thanks. That is certainly fitting, as the worshippers thank the universal creator for the privilege of being 'the sheep of his pasture.' The term 'thanksgiving', Hebrew *todah*, can also be the name for the thanksgiving offering, one kind of peace-offering; refer to Leviticus 7:12-15. Since the peace-offering is a meal enjoyed in God's presence, this too is fitting for the psalm; but there is no reason to be so specific. Further, v.4 uses the word in its ordinary sense in parallel with 'praise. There are several phrases shared between this psalm and Psalm 95, as the comments will point out.

### Psalm 101 - Of David. A Psalm.

This is a royal psalm, a song about the place that the Davidic monarchy has in God's plan for his people. This psalm sets out, for David and his heirs, the ideal kind of ruler that they should aim to be. The people who sing this will find their desires for their king shaped by it, and will receive guidance for their prayers for the ruling king.

The psalm's 'I' is the Davidic king, in whom the people are included, despite contrary claims: <<***Now a scoundrel named Sheba son of Bichri, a Benjaminite, happened to be there. He sounded the trumpet and cried out, 'We have no portion in David, no share in the son of Jesse! Everyone to your tents, O Israel!'***>> (2 Samuel 20:1), and: <<***When all Israel saw that the king would not listen to them, the people answered the king, 'What share do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Look now to your own house, O David.'***>> So Israel went away to their tents>> (1 Kings 12:16), and therefore along with whom they sing.

The king's task is his devotion to achieving covenant faithfulness, both in his personal life and in the social life of Israel. As God's people, Israel is called to display the true humanness which is godliness in active operation. The Davidic king should set the pattern for covenant faithfulness, and each Israelite should have the same aims in his own daily life.

In the context of Book 4 (Psalms 90-106), this psalm is already understood to be looking forward to a new David, as confirmed by Psalm 72. So even before Jesus,

the psalm must have been understood to describe the Messiah's reign and his requirements. Christians sing this, rejoicing that they have in Jesus the perfect embodiment of the Davidic ideal; this can lead them to reflect on what kind of people they should aim to be, with such a king. They can further embrace its ideal of leadership in church and state, and seek to honour such leaders when they appear. This is the first psalm attributed to David since Psalm 86; the only other Davidic psalm in Book 4 is Psalm 103.

### Psalm 102 - A prayer of one afflicted, when faint and pleading before the Lord.

The title, 'a prayer of one afflicted,' makes it clear that this is an individual lament. At the same time, it is certainly not individualistic: the 'I' who sings this, whose troubles are so poignantly described here in all their inexplicability, sees himself as a member of a community, Zion; his own well-being is ultimately bound up with the promised well-being of God's people. The psalm also contrasts the shortness of human life with God's enduring life. Probably the repeated 'my days' are intended to put 'your [God's] years'.

As mentioned, the psalm is suited for one whose troubles seem to be unexplained, not unlike Job's: even God's 'indignation and anger' does not appear to be directed toward any specific sin. Nevertheless, singing this prayer equips the eye of faith to see God's ultimate purposes for the whole people of God and to look forward to participation in that blessedness.

### Psalm 103 - Of David.

This is a hymn of praise, celebrating the abundant goodness and love of the Lord for his people. It is the first of four psalms reflecting on God's dealings with his people from creation to exile. Psalm 103, the last of only three Davidic psalms in Book IV, introduces the sequence by recalling that Israel's survival in the time of Moses was due to God's steadfast love.

It begins with each individual singer exhorting his or her own soul to bless the Lord and then goes on to list the benefits that the soul should be careful not to forget. The crowning benefit is God's enduring love to the descendants of the faithful, which leads the worshippers to exhort all the angelic hosts and all the material creation to join in blessing the Lord. These benefits come to the individual but are not individualistic: he or she is a member of the community, and he or she contributes to the progress of that community.

As the commentary will show, the psalm takes the Pentateuch story for granted, with evocations of Genesis 2:7 and 17:7, as well as Exodus Chapters 32-34. Christians enter into the joy of this psalm as they celebrate how the biblical story that has developed since that time has displayed even more of God's goodness and kindness. Psalm 104, although not by David, is probably placed next to this one because it too begins and ends with <<**Bless the Lord, O my soul**>>. Psalm 145 is

the other example of a Davidic psalm that is a sustained celebration of God’s goodness and benevolence.

### Psalm 104

The phrase ‘Bless the Lord, O my soul,’ which opens and closes the psalm, shows that the psalm is about reasons for speaking well about God. This hymn of praise celebrates the way the created order reveals God’s glory by providing so abundantly for all living things. Although it does not use many specific words from Genesis 1:1-2:3, it is generally agreed that the creation account’s ideas lie behind the psalm. Some have even suggested that the psalm is structured around the six workdays of God.

Creation day	Psalm 104 verses
Day 1	2a: Light
Day 2	2b-4: The expanse divides the waters
Day 3	5-13: land and water distinct 14-18: vegetation and trees
Day 4	19-24: light-bearers as time-keepers
Day 5	25-26: sea creatures
Day 6	21-24: land animals and man 27-30: food for all creatures

#### **Days of Creation and Psalm 104 Verses**

This structure, however, should not be pressed, since the land animals and man (vv.21-24) here precede the sea creatures (vv.25-26), while the Genesis account has them in the opposite order. Even more, this is not a straight retelling of the Genesis account as an event: rather, it celebrates the way in which the creation order still continues in human experience. The psalm acknowledges the existence of human sin, but in only one verse (v.35).

This psalm shapes the worshippers’ hearts in two ways. First, it leads them to delight in the world that God made, recognising it as a gift. Second, it enables them to see that ‘sinners’ and ‘the wicked’, i.e. those who dwell in their sin and refuse God’s grace, defile God’s world; the faithful will not want to be identified with such people.

Genesis 1:1-2:3 uses the term God for the deity, stressing his role as the transcendent creator. Psalm 104 primarily uses ‘the Lord, the personal name of the deity, following the biblical claim that the covenant God of Israel is the same being as the majestic creator. This psalm joins Psalm 8 as a reflection on God’s continuing commitment to, and care for, his creation.

This psalm is often said to be connected to the Great Hymn to Aten, which is generally attributed to the Egyptian Pharaoh Akhenaten, who ruled between 1352-1336 BC. This Pharaoh attempted a drastic revision of Egyptian religion, aiming to focus worship on only one god, Aten, represented by the disk of the sun. Egyptologists continue to debate whether he was a true monotheist, believing that there is only one God, or a henotheist, worshipping one god while allowing for others. The hymn celebrates the works of this deity, including his provision of water and food for man and beast; it distinguishes between creatures active during daylight and those active at night even mentioning the lions. There are certainly similarities between this Egyptian hymn and Psalm 104, but there is no evidence that the psalm derives from the Egyptian hymn. As the commentary will show, the psalm reflects the covenantal and creational perspective of the Pentateuch. If there is any connection to the Egyptian hymn, and it is questionable whether most Israelites would have known of it, it is that this psalm renders the right kind of praise to the universal creator.

### **Psalm 105**

This is a hymn celebrating God’s faithful dealings with his people, particularly reflecting on episodes from the Pentateuch in which the people interacted with powerful foreigners who might have harmed them: Abimelech (Genesis Chapter 20), Potiphar (Genesis Chapters 39-41), and Pharaoh (Exodus, especially Chapters 7-14).

The tone of Psalm 105 is one of gratitude: each member of the singing congregation should recognise that he is an heir and beneficiary of all these great deeds that God has done, so that each one will embrace his calling to live as a member of God’s holy people. It is the only psalm to recall explicitly the promises to the patriarchs.

Psalm 105 is a ‘historical psalm’ like Psalms 78 and 106. Psalm 106 takes up events that follow those of Psalm 105, stressing God’s patience with his people when they disbelieved and rebelled. The theme of the people’s disbelief is absent from Psalm 105. Verses 28-36 recount eight of the ten plagues sent upon the Egyptians, leaving out the fifth and sixth; refer to Exodus 9:1-12. The psalm mentions the ninth plague first, and has the third and fourth in reverse order. There is no doubt that the psalm depends on Exodus; the difference between the two accounts is due to the different purposes behind the accounts. Exodus gives the fuller narrative, while Psalm 105 focuses on features that display God’s faithfulness.

The first 15 verses of Psalm 105 are also found in 1 Chronicles 22:8-22 and presented there as a composition of David, written and sung for the bringing of the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem. It is reasonable to therefore conclude that although this psalm is specifically attributed to King David, he is the author of it.

### Psalm 106

This historical psalm recites a series of events from Israel's history to illustrate God's steadfast love in the face of Israel's rebellion and unfaithfulness. The events are selected from Israel's time following Moses in the wilderness recorded in the Books of Exodus and Numbers, and from the time when Israel repeatedly indulged in rebellion against the Lord after the death of Joshua, recorded in the Book of Judges. All of the episodes are instances of the whole people being unfaithful and of God's continuing commitment to maintain this people and to foster among them the conditions in which piety can flourish. The focus is therefore on corporate unfaithfulness and forgiveness.

The psalm begins by calling on the people to give thanks and praise to God; and it ends in a prayer that the God who has shown such forbearance will once again deliver his people, apparently this time from exile. In view of where the psalm ends up, it is best to call it a community lament.

The specific occasion for this psalm is some kind of exile, in which the people must be gathered from among the nations that had taken them captive. The obvious candidate for this is the Babylonian exile. One difficulty with this conclusion is that there is no mention of the dynasty of David, so caution is appropriate. In any case, the psalm is suited for a variety of recurring situations in which the people of God, including some Christians even today, are in a crisis that results from their persistent unfaithfulness.

A version of vv.47-48 appears in 1 Chronicles 16:35-36 as part of the song for bringing the ark to Jerusalem. Assuming that Chronicles records something like the actual song on the occasion, then probably the psalmist adapted the words of that song for his purposes.