

Psalm 25

Psalm 25

Setting

We have seen three carefully organized groups of Psalms within Book 1 so far.

- Psalms 1-2 emphasize the close relation between keeping the law and being king.
- Psalms 3-14 describe how God cares for the weak, focusing on the victory of babes and sucklings in Psalm 8
- Psalms 15-24 tell us that we must keep God's law if we are to dwell with him.

Robertson suggests that 26-32 and 33-41 also have internal coherence, leading to the overview of Figure 1 (chart). This clustering isolates Psalm 25. It doesn't fit neatly into the structures on either side. In addition, it calls special attention to itself as an acrostic,¹ and falls at the center of a chiasm:

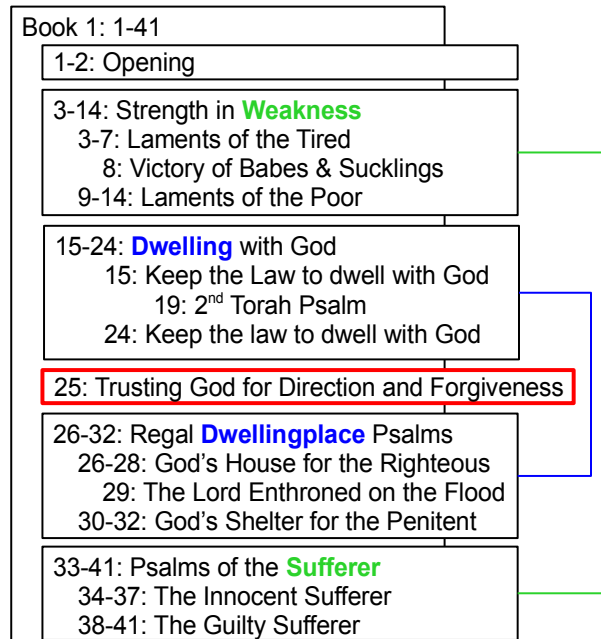


Figure 1: Overview of Book 1

- Psalms 15 and 24 emphasize dwelling with God, and this section expresses the Psalmist's desire to dwell with the Lord. Psalms 26-32 concentrate terms for God's dwellingplace.
- Psalms 3-14 emphasize God's care for the weak, and Robertson characterizes 33-41 as psalms of the sufferer.

This symmetry, and the distinctive acrostic, mark Psalm 25 as the center of Book 1, and we will see numerous links to earlier and later Psalms in this Book.

Figure 2 (chart) shows the structure of the Psalm. The Psalm begins and ends with a statement of David's hope in the Lord, and his request that the Lord not let him come to shame before his enemies. In between these paragraphs, three times he alternates between describing God's direction, and asking for forgiveness for his own sins. The final verse, which stands outside the acrostic structure, generalizes the principles of the Psalm to the entire nation. The overall theme of the Psalm is the expression of David's longing to follow the Lord, and his confidence that God's forgiveness and direction will deliver him from all enemies.

1-3, 19-21, Trusting in the Lord

Setting aside v. 22 for the moment, note the key themes in the inclusio.

¹ Underlined words start with successive letters of the alphabet. The acrostic has four deviations: ק and ו are missing, ר is doubled, and there is an extra ה at the end. Benun suggests that the lack of ק and ו is meant to call attention to the key word קוה, while Leeman suggests that the final ה is an athbash for the missing ו (but does not explain the missing ק), and someone I've read suggests that the final ה means that the first, middle, and final letters form the name of the first letter, הלא. These suggestions are interesting, but highly speculative.

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Psa 25:1 A Psalm of David.--This Psalm has no category assigned to it, just a note that David wrote it.

The first three and last three verses correspond closely to one another (Table 1, chart), and set the overall theme for the Psalm. Note the following correspondences.

- David faces enemies, who seek to abuse him. Both sections use the word “enemy,” and the verb translated “transgress” בגד Strong 898 refers specifically to treacherous behavior, corresponding to “cruel hatred” in v. 19 (an offense against one’s fellow man, not sin against God as in the center of the Psalm).



Figure 2: Structure of Psalm 25

- He trusts God to deliver him, using three different verbs (see Note). While all three of these verbs are common in Psalms, this and Psalm 37 are the only Psalms that have all three. Clearly, this trust is a major theme of the Psalm, and given the Psalm’s central location, in Book 1.
 - The most common and most general is בטח Strong 982, translated “trust” in v. 2, the OT counterpart to the NT notion of faith. David trusts in God to deliver him from his enemies.
 - Both the opening and the closing use קוה Strong 6960, which the LXX translates by προμεινω, the usual NT word for endurance, the aspect of our faith that hangs on in the confidence that God will deliver us in the end.
 - “Trust” in v. 20, at the end, is חסה Strong 2620, which describes taking refuge in the Lord.
- He describes the risk he faces as being ashamed בוש Strong 954, which describes, not internal shame, but disgrace in the eyes of others (so TWOT).

4-18, Alternation: Direction and Forgiveness

The inclusio sets the theme for the Psalm: trusting patiently in God in the face of adversity. The center part of the Psalm repeatedly highlights two things that must characterize anyone who would trust in the Lord: submission to his direction, and recognition of our need for his

<p>1 <u>Unto</u> thee, O LORD, do I lift up my soul. 2 O my God, I trust בטח in thee: let me not be ashamed, let not mine enemies triumph over me.</p> <p>3 Yea, let none that wait קוה on thee be ashamed: let them be ashamed which transgress בגד without cause.</p>	<p>19 <u>Consider</u> mine enemies; for they are many; and they hate me with cruel hatred.</p> <p>20 O <u>keep</u> my soul, and deliver me: let me not be ashamed; for I put my trust חסה in thee.</p> <p>21 Let <u>integrity</u> and uprightness preserve me; for I wait קוה on thee.</p>
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Table 1: The Inclusio of Psalm 25

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forgiveness. Together, these characterize true biblical repentance: not just confession of sin, but desire to walk in righteousness in the future, and openness to the Lord’s teaching to that end.

This section is an alternation with three panels (Figure 2). Each panel begins with a request for direction, and ends with a prayer for forgiveness. All three forgiveness paragraphs are requests, as is the first paragraph about direction. But the second and third paragraphs about direction shift from request to confident statement that God will direct, and from himself (shew me) to others.

The section draws heavily on the record of Israel’s sin with the golden calf and Moses’ intercession with the Lord in Exod 32-34.² The three terms for sin in vv. 7, 11, and 18 come together in God’s declaration of his name to Moses, as do the motives for God’s forgiveness (Table 2, chart). That revelation emboldens David to ask for forgiveness. Each forgiveness paragraph emphasizes a different divine motive.

Exo 34:5 And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed **the name** of the LORD....
 6 The LORD, The LORD God,
merciful רחום and **gracious חנון**, longsuffering, and abundant in **goodness תוך** and **truth אמת**
 7 Keeping **mercy תוך** for thousands, forgiving **iniquity עון** and **transgression חטא** and **sin חטא**,

Psa 25:5 Lead me in thy **truth אמת**
 6 Remember, O LORD, thy **tender mercies רחם** and thy **lovingkindnesses תוך**;
 7 Remember not the **sins חטא** of my youth, nor my **transgressions חטא**;
 according to thy **mercy תוך** remember thou me for thy goodness' sake, O LORD.
 10 All the paths of the LORD are **mercy תוך** and **truth אמת** unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.
 11 For thy **name's** sake, O LORD, pardon mine **iniquity עון**; for it is great.
 16 Turn thee unto me, and have **mercy חן** upon me; for I am desolate and afflicted.
 18 Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and forgive all my **sins חטא** .

Table 2: Echoes of Exodus 34:5-7 in Psalm 25

The direction sections begin in v. 4 with an allusion to Moses’ prayer in Exodus 33,

Exo 33:13 Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, **shew me now thy way**, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight:

The subsequent direction sections all develop this theme with synonyms for “shew” (teach, lead, guide) and “way” (paths, truth, judgment, covenant). As with the forgiveness paragraphs, each direction paragraph describes a different motive for God to provide guidance to his people.

The themes of direction and forgiveness are consistent across the three panels. They are distinguished (Table 3, chart) by the petitioner’s attitude, and God’s motive for responding.

	4-7	8-11	12-18
Human attitude	5 on thee do I wait קוה all the day	9 The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way	12 What man is he that feareth the Lord ? 14 The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him
Divine motive	6 thy lovingkindnesses ... thy mercy חסד	8 Good and upright is the Lord 11 For thy name's sake , O Lord ...	16 have mercy חן upon me

Table 3: Distinguishing the Three Panels

² See Benun in the Journal of Hebrew Scriptures, 6:2006, http://www.jhsonline.org/Articles/article_55.pdf

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4-7 The Covenant God Saves those who Wait on him

In the first panel, David recalls God's role as the savior of his people, and his promise of covenant love through Moses. Each paragraph is a request.

4 Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths. 5 Lead me in thy truth, and teach me:-- David's initial request for direction echoes Moses' prayer in Exod 33:13. This is the only time David asks for direction; in the next two panels, he confidently expects it.

David's desire for instruction shows the heart of a disciple, one who is hungry for the master's instruction. The NT name for Christians is not "believers," but "disciples," those who pray this prayer along with David. They hunger and thirst after righteousness, and are open to the Lord's instruction to that end.

for thou art the God of my salvation;--"My salvation" is probably objective genitive: the salvation that impacts me. "God of my salvation" is then the God who saves me. The divine motive that David presents for this instruction is that God has dedicated himself to the salvation of his people. For David, salvation is not just deliverance from enemies, but from his own errors. In the context here, we are reminded of the mission of his descendant the Messiah, whose mission was to "save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21). David wants God to show, teach, and lead him as part of his work

on thee do I wait קוה all the day.--Here is the verb for patient endurance that we saw in the inclusio. David is willing to wait on the Lord's instruction.

6 Remember, O LORD, thy tender mercies [רחם pities] and thy lovingkindnesses חסד; [Exod 34:6] for they have been ever of old. 7 Remember not the sins חטאת of my youth, nor my transgressions פשע: according to thy mercy חסד remember thou me for thy goodness' sake, O LORD.--Having submitted himself to God's instruction, he can ask for his forgiveness. He calls on God's mercies and covenant love, prominent features from Exodus 34, that also lie behind his role as their savior (v. 5).

The final phrase, "for thy goodness' sake," is a link to the motive for the second panel.

8-11 The Upright God Guides the Meek

Building off the concluding phrase in the previous panel, David focuses on God's character. In the language of Exodus 34:6, he shows not only covenant love, but also truth.

The first paragraph, the one about direction, has changed from a request to a statement, but the second paragraph continues to be a request.

8 Good and upright is the LORD: therefore will he teach sinners in the way. 9 The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way.--The distinctive term for the attitude of the believer in this paragraph is "meek" ענו (Strong 6035). This term appeared twice in Psalm 9-10, where it described the weak ones whom the Lord delivers. We will see it again in Ps 37:11 "the meek shall inherit the earth," which our Lord echoes in the beatitudes. The term describes those who are humble, not self-assertive, but submissive to the Lord.

10 All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth [Exod 34:6] unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.--In vv. 4-5, the possessive pronouns describing what God teaches us (thy ways, thy paths, thy truth) are ambiguous. Do they mean simply that these guidelines are

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imposed by God? Or are they the ways, the paths, the truth that characterize his conduct? Here, the latter characteristic comes into focus. The way that he teaches us is consistent with his own goodness and uprightness (v. 8). The paths in which he leads us are the mercy and truth that he declared to guide his own conduct in Exodus 34:6.

The NT emphasizes that we are to become like the Lord Jesus. David already recognizes in the OT that he is to become like his God in showing justice and mercy.

11 For thy name's sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity פְּדוּנִי; for it is great.--When David turns to ask for forgiveness, the motive he claims is consistent with the good and upright Lord. God has his own name to uphold. This argument is another link to the episode of the golden calf (chapter), recalling Moses' intercession for the people:

Exo 32:12 **Wherefore should the Egyptians speak**, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people.

Joshua also pleads on these terms with God after the sin of Achan led to the defeat at Ai,

Jos 7:9 For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear *of it*, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto **thy great name**?

12-18 The Merciful God Cares for those who Fear him

In the third panel, the focal attribute of God (v. 16) is his mercy. This is not the word for covenant love, but a different term that emphasizes condescension to those who recognize their humble position, who fear him (vv. 12, 14).

As in the second panel, the paragraph about the Lord's instruction is a statement, while the paragraph about forgiveness continues to be a request.

12 What man is he that feareth the LORD?--As we saw in Ps 19:9, there is a righteous fear of the Lord that endures forever, stemming from a love for him so intense that we tremble at the thought of doing anything to offend him.

him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose.--One who has this attitude of complete surrender can expect the Lord's direction.

13 His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth.--We will see this expression five times in Psalm 37. It is a central expression in the history of the exodus and conquest (59 instances out of 98 total in Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Joshua). The episode of the golden calf, which inspires this Psalm, threatened to exclude the people from the land, but David realizes that those who truly seek to please the Lord will enjoy his blessings.

14 The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him;--"He shares his secret counsels with those that fear him." If we would understand the deep things of God, we must have fear him.

and he will shew them his covenant.--More precisely, "cause them to know." Only those who truly fear him can understand his covenant with his people.³

3 Literally, "his covenant, to cause them to know." Some understand this as synthetic parallelism rather than synonymous: "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and so is his covenant, to give them knowledge." But as Delitzsch remarks, the *hifil* of עָדַת never appears absolutely, but always with specification of that of which knowledge is given. 2 Sam 7:21 is a possible exception, but even there the Lord's object seems to be to instruct David in the covenant, not to give him knowledge in general.

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15 Mine eyes are ever toward the LORD;--Here is yet another expression describing our attitude toward the Lord. The fullest exposition of it comes in one of the psalms of ascent:

Psa 123:2 Behold, as the eyes of servants *look* unto the hand of their masters, *and* as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes *wait* upon the LORD our God, until that he have mercy upon us.

One of our neighbors⁴ was at a tea party attended by the queen of the Netherlands. She would take a sip of her tea, then hold her cup off to the side, without looking, and release it. It was the job of her servant to watch her constantly and have a saucer ready to receive the cup. This attention to the Lord's desires is a good explanation of fearing him.

for he shall pluck my feet out of the net.--God rewards such an attitude with deliverance.

16 Turn thee unto me, and have mercy [נחן be gracious] upon me; for I am desolate and afflicted. 17 The troubles of my heart are enlarged: O bring thou me out of my distresses.<נ lacking> 18 Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and forgive all my sins נחן.--Here is the final request for forgiveness, motivated by an appeal to God's mercy, which in this case is his condescension to those of low degree.

The next three verses take us back to the opening. Note all the terms we have seen for our attitude toward the Lord (chart): trust (belief), waiting, taking refuge, meekness, fearing the Lord, and fixing our eyes on him. This array of terms, at the center of Book 1, reminds us of how shallow and superficial the modern notion of "easy believism" is in describing the relation God wants us to have with himself.

22, Postscript

22 Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles.--This verse seems at first anomalous, for two reasons. It falls outside the acrostic, which ended with נ in v. 21, and it is a petition for the nation, while everything up to now is for David personally. However, it is anticipated in the shift from the request in vv. 4-5 to "shew, teach, lead me" to the statements in later panels that the Lord will direct the sinners (vv. 8-10) and those who fear him (vv. 12-15).

Previously, we have read very personal Psalms by David, which he or the editor has committed to the chief musician for public edification. This Psalm has no dedication to the chief musician, but perhaps this verse serves a similar function. David is claiming that the principles he has learned in his pilgrimage are applicable to the rest of the nation as well.⁵

He is willing to expose his own spiritual problems to others, so that they can learn from them. This conclusion to Psalm 25 is very much in this spirit. He does not try to hide from his contemporaries the many confessions of sin that it contains, but publishes it as an example for others in seeking God's redemption.

4 Jon Heise of UM's International Students Office

5 Compare his promise in Ps 51:12-13.

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Notes

Words for Trust: חסה, בטח, and קוה

This note extends the note on בטח Strong 982 and חסה Strong 2620 in the study on Psalms 3-14 by adding קוה Strong 6960. Figure 3 shows the distribution of these terms throughout the Psalter, and Table 4 shows how the LXX translates them.

	בטה	חסה	קוה
Ελπίζω	47	19	2
Πειθω	73	9	2
υπομενω	0	0	23

Table 4: Words for "hope, trust"

Trust חסה means to take refuge, not just to adopt a mental attitude (the more frequent word בטח). It frequently appears with reference to images of God as a rock or a sheltering wing:

Psa 18:2 The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will **trust**; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.

Psa 91:4 He shall cover סכך thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou **trust** חסה: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.

Trust is drawing close to the Lord, allowing him to come between us and the threat. The result is rejoicing—the most common term for happiness, used to wish someone a happy birthday or happy holiday.

Isaiah promises this function in a God-man, anticipating Christ:

Isa 25:4 For **thou** [יהוה] hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a **refuge** מחסה from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall.

Isa 32:1 Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment. 2 And **a man** shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

Only two Psalms, 25 and 37, contain all three words.

In the light of the NT emphasis on faith (πιστις, πιστευω), one is led to inquire about the role of these concepts in Psalms. Table 5 shows the lexical correspondences, and Figure 4 plots instances of the verb אמן. It's clearly complementary to verbs for trust and hope (Figure 3), and is concentrated in Psalms 78 and 89. In addition, many of the instances are forms of the verb indicating

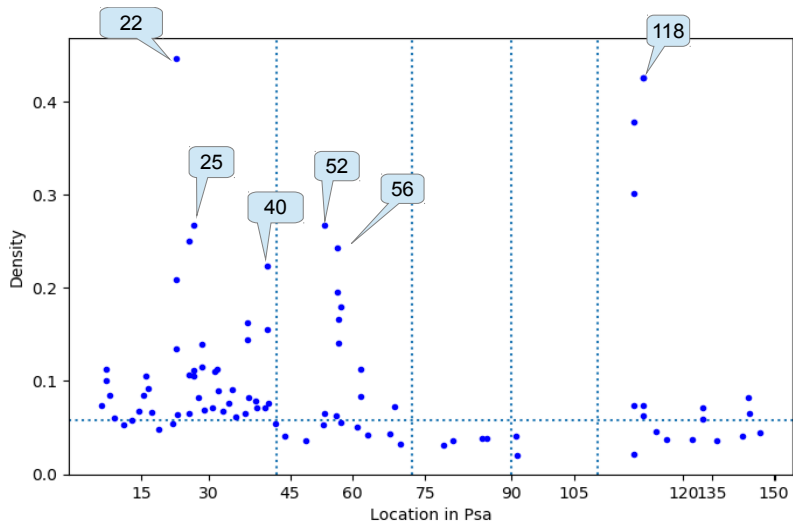


Figure 3: חסה, בטח, and קוה in Psalms

	אמן	אמונה	אמת
πιστευω	44		
πιστις	1	19	5
πιστος	30	1	1
αληθεια		22	82

Table 5: πιστις and Cognates in the OT

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trustworthiness or stability, rather than the NT notion of “believe.”

Echoes of Exodus 34 in the Psalms

Wenham notes that God’s great confession of his name to Moses is common throughout the Psalms. This Psalm appears to be the first instance of it. There are many instances of דָּבָר וְאֱמִתּוֹת (Ps. 25:10; 26:3; 40:11-12; 57:4, 11;

61:8; 69:14; 85:11; 86:15; 89:15; 108:5; 117:2; 138:2). In addition, note the more full citations:

Psa 86:15 But thou, O Lord, *art* a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.

Psa 103:8 The LORD *is* merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

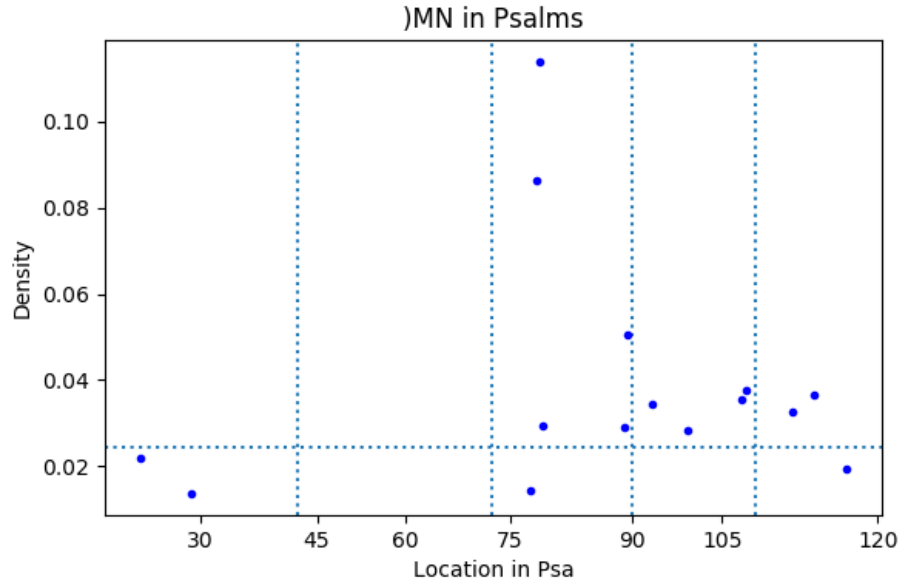


Figure 4: The verb מָנָה in Psalms