

# Five Books and Psalm 14

## The Five Books of the Psalms and Psalms 14, 53

### Overview

The final editor of the Psalms has organized it into five books. We identify these books and presenting a hypothesis about their meaning. Then we look in more detail at two Psalms that are almost identical, but occur in different books, as an illustration of the importance of the division.

### The Five Books of the Psalms

Evidence of the Five Books is seen in the doxologies with which each book ends, and reflected in the uneven distribution of authors, divine names, and genres across these five sections.

### The Doxologies

The main indicator of the five books are the closing doxologies. Four of them declare God to be blessed and include a response of “Amen” by the people (chart):

Psa 41:13 **Blessed be** the LORD God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting. **Amen, and Amen.**

Psa 72:18 **Blessed be** the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things.<sup>19</sup> And **blessed be** his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled *with* his glory; **Amen, and Amen.** 20 The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.

Psa 89:52 **Blessed be** the LORD for evermore. **Amen, and Amen.**

Psa 106:48 **Blessed be** the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting: and let all the people say, **Amen.** Praise ye the LORD [Hallelujah].

In the case of 72:18-20, note the final verse. In fact, in the current form of the book, 18 later psalms, distributed across all of the book, are attributed to David! This verse apparently marks the end of an earlier collection, which was supplemented by the final editor.

The fourth collection adds the phrase “Hallelujah,” and this phrase marks the last five psalms in the collection, forming a finale to the whole:

Psa 146-150 [Each begins and ends with “Hallelujah,” “Praise ye the Lord.”]

### The Authors

Figure 1 (chart) shows the relative size of the five books, and how many psalms in each are attributed to each author.

Books 1 and 5 are largest, at 41 and 44 psalms each, while the third and fourth have only 17 psalms apiece.

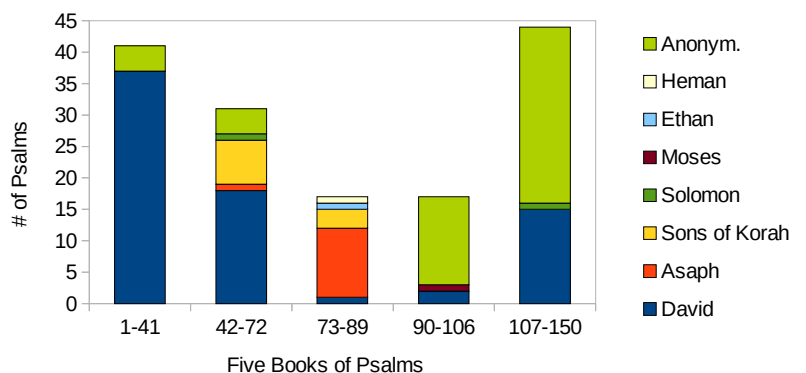
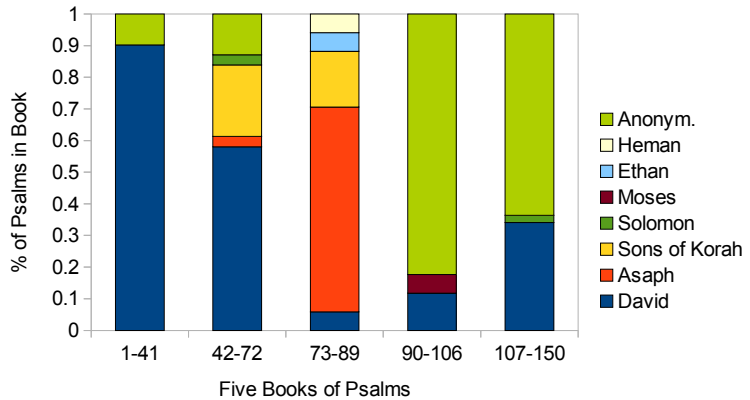


Figure 1: Authors by Book

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Figure 2 (chart) shows authorship as a percentage of each book. David dominates the first two books, while the last two are mostly anonymous. Books 2 and 3 contain most of the attributed psalms by people other than David, including Asaph and the sons of Korah.



### The Divine Names

A third mark is the distribution of the divine names LORD (יהוה, Strong 3068) and God (אלהים, Strong 430) (Figure 3, chart).<sup>1</sup>

Books 1, 4, and 5 all have 0.4-0.5% of their words as divine names, mostly LORD or the short form Yah. Book 2 has about the same percentage of divine names, but almost all of them are El or Elohim, and Yah and Yahweh are very rare. Divine names in book 3 are less than 0.4% of the total.<sup>2</sup>

Fig 3

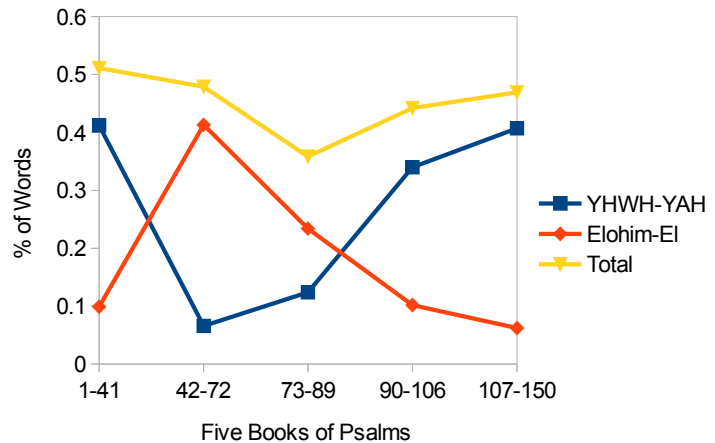


Figure 3: Divine Names in the Five Books

### Genres

Recall that we can group the Psalms into seven or so genres:<sup>3</sup> lament, hymn, confidence, remembrance, kingship, thanksgiving, and wisdom. Figure 4 (chart) shows their distribution across the five books. Lament is prominent in the first three books, but almost disappears from the last two, while hymns of praise to the Lord, grow from a minority of the earlier books to a major segment of the last two. Book 4 emphasizes kingship, Note also the emphasis on kingship, and Books 3-5 have most of the remembrance psalms.

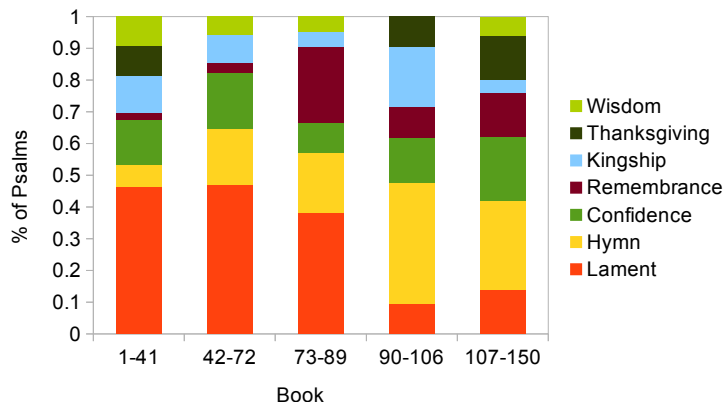


Figure 4: Genres in the Five Books

### Robertson's Analysis

Recently, O. Palmer Robertson<sup>4</sup> has suggested an editorial plan that

- 1 The statistics include the short forms יה and אל.
- 2 In Book 3, Asaph and 8/10 of Korah prefer אלהים; David, Ethan, Heman (all in last 5 pss), יהוה.
- 3 Wendland has ten genres: petition, thanksgiving, praise, instruction, profession of trust, repentance, remembrance, retribution, royalty, and liturgy. We follow Longman's system.

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explains these observations, which we will explore in our studies. He summarizes the book as Confrontation, Communication, Devastation, Maturation, and Consummation (chart).

Book 1, Pss 1-41, describes the **Confrontation** between Israel's Messianic king and his opposition. In psalms of lamentation, David, the prototypical king, calls to God for help against his enemies (historically, Saul and Absalom).

Book 2, Pss 42-72, deals with the **Communication** of Messiah's claims to the Gentiles, and thus favors the general name of God אלהים over the covenant name יהוה. David is again in the forefront, as the first king who significantly expanded Israel's reach to other nations. The final psalm, 72, envisions the rule of God's king over all the earth.

Book 3, Pss 73-89, focuses on the **Devastation** of God's people by the Gentiles. This emphasis accounts for the reduction in divine names: from the people's perspective it looks as though God has abandoned them. We see it reflected also in the large collection of the psalms of Asaph, who was, as we shall see, a seer, anticipating much of Israel's later troubles. The closing psalm, 89, describes Israel's king as powerless, as though God's covenant were broken.

Book 4, Pss 90-106, shows the **Maturation** of Israel's hope, an attitude reflected in the recognition that ultimately the Lord is king (the kingship psalms). This attitude sustained the nation through the Assyrian and Babylonian crises, when there was no human king. Lament fades away and is replaced by hymns of worship.

Book 5, Pss 107-150, anticipates the **Consummation** of the Messianic kingdom as God's Messiah is established.

## Psalms 14, 53

The difference in divine names between Books 1 and 2 is particularly striking in Psalm 14, which is repeated almost identically as Psalm 53, but with יהוה replaced by אלהים (chart). Other less prominent changes correlate with an emphasis in Book 2 on communicating with the Gentiles.

These two Psalms illustrate not only the contrast between Books 1 and 2, but also the lament, the most common type of Psalm, in which a righteous person tells God about the persecution he faces from the wicked and asks for God's help. Nearly half (44/89) of the Psalms in Books 1-3 are laments, forming an interesting progression with the first two psalms.

- Psalm 1 introduces the distinction between the righteous and the ungodly.
- Psalm 2 shows how this distinction leads to conflict between the wicked and God's king.
- Psalms of lament extend the conflict to God's people.

**Psa 14:1 *A Psalm of David.***--Note that "a psalm" is in italics. This composition doesn't give a type notice. It simply says, "By David." In Book 2, the title adds משכיל, which is a causal participle from שכל "to have success." This participle appears 21 times in the OT outside of the titles, where it means either "to behave wisely" or "to impart wisdom." Thus in the titles it indicates psalms intended to convey prudent instruction. Seven of the 13 psalms that carry this indication are in Book 2 with its theme of Communication. The other six are in books 1, 3, and 5.

We can discern three paragraphs:

- The state of mankind, vv. 1-3

4 O. Palmer Robertson, *The Flow of the Psalms*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015

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- The opposition of sinful men to God’s people, vv. 4-6
- Israel’s hope, v. 7.

**The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.**--David focuses his attention upon those who deny God, making this Psalm particularly appropriate for sharing with pagan audiences.

**They are corrupt, they have done abominable works,<sup>5</sup> there is none that doeth good.**--So far, the condemnation seems focused only on atheists, leaving religious people to gloat in their superiority. But the next verse does away with this conceit:

**2 The LORD<sup>6</sup> looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. 3 They are all gone aside,<sup>7</sup> they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.**--In fact, among “the children of men,” nobody meets God’s standard. People by their words and actions deny God. For his part, God cannot find any people who meet his requirements.<sup>8</sup>

The condemnation is universal, so it is appropriate to share with the heathen nations in Book 2. In Book 1, the Psalm uses LORD, the covenant name of God in v. 2, but in Psalm 53 it is “God.” Not even the inferior deities of the heathen are satisfied with the conduct of their people.

Vv. 1-3 are an important component of Paul’s conclusion in Romans 3 that all, both Jew and Gentile, have sinned (Table 1, chart). Perhaps the occurrence of this psalm in both Book 1 and Book 2 is one reason he gives so much space to it in summarizing his argument.

**4 Have all<sup>9</sup> the workers of iniquity no knowledge? who eat up my people as they eat bread,**

Romans 3	OT Sources
Rom 3:10 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: 11 There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. 12 They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.	Ps 14:1 there is none that doeth good.  2 ... to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. 3 They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.
13 Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit;  the poison of asps is under their lips:	Psa 5:9 their throat is an open sepulchre; they flatter with their tongue.  Psa 140:3 ... adders' poison is under their lips.
14 Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness:	Psa 10:7 His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud:
15 Their feet are swift to shed blood:  16 Destruction and misery are in their ways: 17 And the way of peace have they not known:	Isa 59:7 Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: ... wasting and destruction are in their paths. 8 The way of peace they know not;
18 There is no fear of God before their eyes.	Psa 36:1 ...there is no fear of God before his eyes.

*Table 1: Psalm 14/53 in Romans 3*

5 For עול Ps 53 has עלילה

6 Ps 53 אלהים

7 For הכל Ps 53 has כל

8 This observation is due to Anita Parunak.

9 Lacking in 53

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**and call not upon the LORD.**<sup>10</sup>--Next, David describes how these wicked people treat the Lord's people. Again, Psalm 14 uses LORD, the covenant name, while Psalm 53 uses God.

The next two verses (one verse in Psalm 53), describing the consequence of v. 4, differ considerably between the two versions (Table 2, chart). The grammatical structure is the same in both cases: one statement about somebody in the third person, and one two somebody in the second person, each followed by a reason. But the antecedents of the

Ps 14	Ps 53
5 שָׁם פָּחְדוּ פָּחַד בִּי־אֱלֹהִים בְּדוֹר צַדִּיק: 6 עֲצַת־עֲנִי תִבְיֹשׁ בִּי יְהוָה מִחֶסֶד׃	5 שָׁם פָּחְדוּ פָּחַד לֹא־הָיָה פָּחַד בִּי־אֱלֹהִים פִּזַּר עֲצָמוֹת חַנּוּךְ הַבִּשְׁתָּה בִּי־אֱלֹהִים מִאָסָם׃
5 There were they in great fear: for God is in the generation of the righteous. 6 Ye have shamed the counsel of the poor, because the LORD is his refuge.	5 There were they in great fear, where no fear was: for God hath scattered the bones of him that encampeth against thee: thou hast put them to shame, because God hath despised them.

*Table 2: Replacement of 14:5-6 with 53:5*

pronouns, and the reasons given, differ. In Psalm 14, they both refer to “the workers of iniquity” in v. 4, while in Psalm 53, they both refer to “my people.”

**5 There were they in great fear:**--The “they” here in Psalm 14 must be “the workers of iniquity” in v. 4, for the reason is that God undertakes the care of “my people”:

**for God is in the generation of the righteous.**--The reassurance to the godly here is the same as in the NT, “Lo, I am with you always.” God is among his people, and nobody can touch them without his permission.

In Psalm 53, the reference of the pronoun shifts. Now “they” refers to “my people,” and David adds, “where no fear was.” Unlike the wicked in Psalm 14, the righteous need not fear, for God has ultimate power over their adversaries.

**6 Ye have shamed the counsel of the poor,**--Again, the pronoun refers to “the workers of iniquity.” The verb is not past tense, but present/future: “You may indeed frustrate the plans of the poor,” acknowledging that God often allows the wicked some liberty with his children.

**because the LORD is his refuge.**--The wicked may frustrate the counsel of the poor, but they cannot deprive him of his true refuge, which is the Lord himself.

In Psalm 53, the tables are turned. Now God's people will shame, not just the plans of the wicked, but the wicked themselves. God offers no refuge to the wicked, but despises them.

**7 Oh that the salvation<sup>11</sup> of Israel were come out of Zion!**--The expression “salvation of Israel” is perhaps a reference to Jehovah, bursting forth from his sanctuary and coming to the aid of his people, as in Psalm 20,

Psa 20:1 The LORD hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee; 2 Send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion;

<sup>10</sup> Ps 53 אֱלֹהִים

<sup>11</sup> Ps 53 has יְשׁוּעוֹת where 14 has יְשׁוּעָה, putting plural for singular. There, the personal reference is no longer possible, and the plural is one of abstraction: see Waltke and O'Connor 7.4.2.

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**when the LORD bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad.**--The attribution of this Psalm (and of Psalm 53) to David has been challenged on the basis of the reference to the captivity. But David knew from Deuteronomy that the nation would go into captivity for its sins, and then be restored. The first instance of the expression “bring back the captivity” in the Bible appears in Deut 30:3, and other than Job 42:10, the next is Ps 14:7.

Deu 30:1 And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, 2 And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; 3 That then the LORD thy God will **turn thy captivity**, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee.

Having just lamented the corruption of the human race, David recognizes the inevitability of the judgment of which God warned through Moses, but also looks forward to the deliverance promised in Deut 30:3.

Ps 53 adds (Ps 54 in our version),

**Psa 54:1 To the chief Musician on Neginoth**—That is, stringed instruments. It is interesting that the version intended for the nations is the one especially committed to use in public worship. 24/31, or more than  $\frac{3}{4}$ , of the psalms in Book 2 are committed to the chief musician; only 20/41 of those in Book 1, less than half. It is as though David recognizes that one day all nations will join in praising the Lord, and he wants them to be included in the songs of the sanctuary.

We can now summarize Psalm 14: *Faced with oppression (v. 4) from a universally wicked world (vv. 1-3), God's people can take refuge in him now (vv. 5-6), and look forward to his future deliverance (v. 7).*