

# PSALMS 1–20

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## **Psalms 1–2: Introduction to the Book of Psalms**

Many scholars, both ancient and modern, as well as many ancient Jewish religious writings viewed Psalms 1 and 2 as a single unit, placed together at the beginning of the book of Psalms to serve as an introduction to the entire collection of one hundred and fifty psalms that we now find in the Old Testament. According to this tradition, the themes, messages, and language of Psalms 1 and 2 are seen as overlapping and were given their current place by the editors of the collection’s final form so that these themes would establish what they understood to be the overarching message of the book of Psalms.

In light of this understanding, it is important for readers who study and desire to grasp the meaning of the Psalms to seek insight into the message of these two introductory psalms. Psalm 1 presents a beatitude, declaring that “blessed” (or “happy”) is the “man” who does not follow in the ways of the ungodly and sinners. This righteous man delights in the law (Hebrew *torah*) of the Lord, meditating on it day and night (1:1–2). In Psalm 2 (verses 1–2), the heathen kings of the earth have gathered to rebel against the Lord and against His anointed (Hebrew *mashiah*, “messiah”). The Lord declares that He has “set my king upon my holy hill of Zion” (2:6–7). The anointed king, or Messiah, then announces the decree that the Lord has given him: “The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.”

Many commentators have seen a connection between the righteous man of Psalm 1 and the anointed king of Psalm 2, suggesting that they are one and the same—the chosen Messiah who loves and follows the law of the Lord. He is the ideal king, an example for all humankind to emulate. Following this interpretation and viewing Psalms 1 and 2 as the introduction to the rest of the Psalms collection, David C. Mitchell argued, “The theme of how [the Lord’s] *mashiah* will conquer all opposition and rule the

world from Zion must be considered as one of the broad, overarching themes of the Psalms, in whose light all the ensuing lyrics . . . should be interpreted.”<sup>1</sup>

### ***Related verses***

Deuteronomy 17:14–20; Joshua 1:5–8

### **Psalm 1:1–3**

The first entry in the Old Testament’s collection of psalms is believed to have been placed at the beginning to serve as an introduction (along with Psalm 2) for the rest of the collection. The righteous “man” whose “delight is in the law [Hebrew *torah*] of the Lord” is the focus of the psalm. His example of piety toward the law is meant to be one of the overarching themes of the book of Psalms, with the righteous man presented as an example worthy of emulation to all who read these sacred hymns.

Psalm 1 is often categorized as a wisdom psalm because of its similarity to other wisdom literature in the Bible such as Proverbs, which present a distinction between the “two ways”—that of the righteous on one hand and of the wicked on the other. The psalm can be divided into three distinct segments:

1. (verses 1–3)—the righteous man
  - what the righteous man does not do
  - what he does do
  - what he is like (the tree of life)
2. (verses 4–5)—the wicked
  - what they are like (chaff)
  - what they will not do
3. (verse 6)—summary and conclusion (the way of the righteous versus the way of the wicked)

The righteous man in the psalm, according to some interpretations, should be seen as identical to the anointed, or messianic, king of Psalm 2. This view is supported by Deuteronomy 17:14–20, which describes the behavior of the ideal king of Israel: “And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book . . . And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life.”

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<sup>1</sup> David C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter* (Newton Mearns, UK: Campbell Publications, 2003), 245.

Psalm 1:3 compares the Messiah to “a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season.” That this tree is meant to be understood as the tree of life is demonstrated by a comparison with Psalms 52:8; 92:12–15; Ezekiel 47:12; and Revelation 22:1–2. The Messianic King is like the tree of life, planted in or near the temple. The clearest illustration of this imagery can be found in the Book of Mormon, in 1 Nephi 11:21–25, where Nephi was shown that the tree of life his father Lehi saw in vision as well as the fountain of living waters were symbols representing the Son of God.

Considering the parallels between Psalms 1 and 2, Cole asserts, “The parallel text of Ps 2:6 reveals that the righteous one of Ps 1:3a planted in the temple is identical to the king established on Mt. Zion, site of the sanctuary.” He concludes, “The man of Ps 1 is portrayed as a priest, king, and conqueror, which functions are also attributed to the anointed one in the second psalm. He is in fact the central figure and dominating ‘Motiv’ of the Psalter’s entire introduction.”<sup>2</sup>

### ***Related verses***

Psalms 2:6; 46:4–6; 52:8; 92:12–15; Ezekiel 47:12; Revelation 22:1–2; 1 Nephi 8:10–13; 11:21–25

### **Psalm 2:2, 6–7**

Psalm 2 is the first psalm in the collection that is labeled a royal psalm, a category delineated by modern scholars to identify those psalms that feature discussion of, or speech from, the Israelite monarch or that celebrate the office of human kingship. Many of these royal psalms are also recognized as messianic psalms. Early Christian thinkers, including some of the authors of the New Testament, saw many of these royal psalms, including Psalm 2,<sup>3</sup> as containing prophecies of Christ.

Many scholars interpret Psalm 2 to be about the enthronement, or coronation, of a historical Israelite king on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. It is noteworthy to mention that Psalm 2 would likely have been placed in its current position in the introduction to the book of Psalms in a later period, after the time of the Davidic monarchy, when there were no more kings being enthroned. In this post-monarchic, postexilic period, Psalm 2 was often understood eschatologically and messianically. Discussing the placement of Psalm 2 as the introduction to the postexilic compilation of psalms, M. A. Vincent commented:

Victory for God and his son/king is promised and asserted, *at a time when there was no king*, and when the nation had little political significance. To this king God promises the nations and the uttermost part of the world as his inheritance. . . . Reading the Psalter from the perspective of its final form

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<sup>2</sup> See Michael K. Snearly, *The Return of the King: Messianic Expectation in Book V of the Psalter* (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2015), 93–94.

<sup>3</sup> See also, for example, Acts 4:25–28; 13:33; Hebrews 1:5.

and taking into account the editorial decision made in placing this psalm in this position we are forced into understanding it eschatologically, whatever its origins may have been.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, those who put together the book of Psalms in its final form would have understood Psalm 2 to be looking forward prophetically to the coming of a future messianic king who would be considered the begotten Son of God and who would come to rule the heathen nations with a “rod of iron” and to reign over “the uttermost parts of the earth” (Psalm 2:1, 8–9; see Revelation 2:26–27).

### ***Related verses***

Acts 4:25–28; 13:33; Hebrews 1:5; Revelation 2:26–27

### **Psalm 3:3–5**

Psalm 3 is often considered to be a morning prayer for protection because verse 5 can be read as indicating that the psalmist had recently woken up after a night of sleep. It contains a number of parallels with Psalm 4, which is generally interpreted as an evening prayer. The superscription labels the psalm as “a Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son” (see 2 Samuel 15:14). Readers should keep in mind that the superscriptions were apparently added after the initial writing of the psalm and may not reflect the original intention or life setting of the text. That said, the language of military conflict used in the psalm is fitting for the setting described in the superscription.

The psalmist follows a general pattern of expression that can be seen many times throughout the book of Psalms. He begins by (1) lamenting or complaining to the Lord regarding his many enemies and dire circumstances (verses 1–2); he then (2) expresses his faith in God’s power to protect him and answer his prayers (verses 3–4); finally, (3) his confidence is strengthened (verses 5–6), and he renews his plea to the Lord for deliverance and declares again his faith.

Whether the psalm was originally penned by David during his conflict with Absalom or was meant as a more general prayer for protection for Israel’s royal commanders-in-chief, the expressions of fear and faith featured therein are helpful for anyone who struggles with seemingly overwhelming trials and “enemies.” The psalm contains some powerful faith-strengthening concepts. The psalmist sees the Lord as his shield against his enemies. When hope is hard to come by, it is the Lord who lifts up his head (verse 3). Verse 4 testifies of the power of prayer and temple worship (“holy hill” meaning “temple” in this verse). Because

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<sup>4</sup> M. A. Vincent, “The Shape of the Psalter: An Eschatological Dimension?,” in *New Heaven and New Earth: Prophecy and the Millennium, Essays in Honour of Anthony Gelston*, ed. Peter J. Harland and C. T. Robert Hayward (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1999), 66; emphasis in original.

of his trust in the Lord's protective power, the psalmist is able to let go of his fears, relax, and sleep peacefully at night, knowing that God is watching over him (verse 5).

### ***Related verses***

Numbers 20:20; 2 Samuel 15:14; Genesis 15:1; Isaiah 54:17; Ephesians 6:11; Psalms 2:6; 15:1; 18:44

### **Psalm 4:1–8**

Psalm 4 is similar to Psalm 3 in many ways and complements its themes, which may be why they were placed in proximity to each other in the biblical collection of psalms. If Psalm 3 can be considered a prayer given in the morning, Psalm 4 could be seen as an evening prayer for protection. In the first verse, the psalmist cries, “Hear me when I call . . . have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer.” The fact that this prayer is given just before the individual lies down to sleep is evident in the Lord's apparent response: “Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still” (verse 4). The psalmist is reassured and declares, “I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety” (verse 8).

In this song of prayer, the psalmist once again laments the distress that his enemies have caused him. His fear turns to faith and confidence as he contemplates how sure the Lord's promises are. His expressions of renewed trust in the Lord are notable:

- “But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself” (verse 3).
- “The Lord will hear when I call unto him” (verse 3).
- “Put your trust in the Lord” (verse 5).
- “Thou hast put gladness in my heart” (verse 7).
- “Thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety” (verse 8).

Note that the line “Know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself” in verse 3 can be interpreted in both a personal sense, for the individual believer, and also in a messianic sense. The Lord has “set apart,” or separated out in order to protect and preserve, righteous individuals; but He has also “set apart” a particular *him that is godly*—the Messiah—who will assuredly come to protect the righteous. In light of the promise of a messianic deliverer, the directive in verse 4 makes good sense: “Stand in awe and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.”

### ***Related verses***

Psalm 56:9; Micah 7:7; 1 John 5:13–14; Ephesians 2:10; Titus 2:14

## **Psalm 5:3, 7–8**

Psalm 5 can be seen as another morning prayer for protection and justice. The psalmist presents a case to the Lord for why his enemies should be punished and why the righteous should be preserved. The unrighteous have rebelled against God and do all kinds of iniquity, but the psalmist will worship in God's holy temple and will shout for joy because of the Lord's mercy and gracious protection.

Note the similarity of language to the poetic expressions known as Nephi's Psalm in 2 Nephi 4:

“Hearken unto the voice of my cry, my King, and my God: for unto thee will I pray. My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.”  
(Psalm 5:2–3)

“Behold, he hath heard my cry by day, and he hath given me knowledge by visions in the night-time. And by day have I waxed bold in mighty prayer before him; yea, my voice have I sent up on high.”  
(2 Nephi 4:23–24)

“But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple.” (Psalm 5:7)

“And upon the wings of his Spirit hath my body been carried away upon exceedingly high mountains. . . . if the Lord in his condescension unto the children of men hath visited men in so much mercy.”  
(2 Nephi 4:25–26)

“Lead me, O Lord, in thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make thy way straight before my face.” (Psalm 5:8)

“Do not anger again because of mine enemies. . . . O Lord, wilt thou make a way for mine escape before mine enemies! Wilt thou make my path straight before me!” (2 Nephi 4:29, 33)

“But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them: let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee. For thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield.” (Psalm 5:11–12)

“And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins; nevertheless, I know in whom I have trusted. . . . Rejoice, O my heart, and give place no more for the enemy of my soul. . . . Rejoice, O my heart, and cry unto the Lord, and say: O Lord, I will praise thee forever; yea, my soul will rejoice in thee, my God, and the rock of my salvation. . . . O Lord, wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness! . . . O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever.” (2 Nephi 4:19, 28, 30, 33, 34)

## **Psalm 6:2–7**

Psalm 6 is a prayer for healing of both body and spirit. The psalmist appears to be in declining health and prays to the Lord for deliverance from the pain and grief associated with his condition.

Verse 5 (“For in death there is no remembrance of thee”) expresses the anxiety the psalmist feels concerning his worsening state, which he feels could lead to his premature death. The notions regarding the soul’s state in death may reflect the author’s limited understanding of the afterlife compared to the clearer picture we possess in the Restoration, or it may be expressing a concern similar to that of Amulek in Alma 34:33–35:

I beseech of you that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; for after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, if we do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed.

According to John 12:27, the Savior quoted from this psalm as he foretold his own imminent suffering and death: “Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour” (compare Psalm 6:3–4).

The Book of Mormon prophet Nephi was apparently familiar with this psalm, as he likely was with Psalm 5 as well, since he used expressions very similar to those in Psalm 6:6 in 2 Nephi 33:3:

But I, Nephi, have written what I have written, and I esteem it as of great worth, and especially unto my people. For I pray continually for them by day, and mine eyes water my pillow by night, because of them; and I cry unto my God in faith, and I know that he will hear my cry.

### ***Related verses***

Psalm 30:9; John 12:27; 2 Nephi 33:3; Alma 13:27; 34:33–35; Helaman 13:38

## **Psalm 7:1–5, 11–12**

Following the context given in the psalm’s superscription, Psalm 7 presents the psalmist, David, pleading with the Lord to deliver him from the false accusations of Cush the Benjamite (Benjaminite). Although this story is not included elsewhere in the biblical record, David does have a number of documented conflicts with Benjaminites in 1 Samuel 24–26 and 2 Samuel 16, 20, and others. What exactly David is accused of having done is not explained, but the psalm makes it clear that he is being sorely persecuted (they want to “tear [his] soul like a lion”) for something of which he believes he is innocent.

There are a few translation issues and changes in person/referent that make the text of Psalm 7 confusing in places. For example, in verse 7 the psalmist addresses the Lord directly: “Arise, O Lord, in thine anger . . . and awake for me.” The language of the King James Version translation in verse 8, however, is challenging to understand as it appears to depict the psalmist telling the Lord to flee back to His hiding place. The verse reads: “So shall the congregation of the people compass thee [the Lord] about: for their sakes therefore return thou on high.” Rather than encouraging the Omnipotent God to make a quick escape from being mobbed, the verse suggests something quite different if an alternate translation of the Hebrew is given. In the New International Version, the verse is rendered: “Let the assembled peoples gather around you, while you sit enthroned over them on high.”

In verse 11, the psalmist declares that “God is angry with the wicked every day,” but in verse 12, the antecedents of the multiple “he” pronouns begin to be confusing (“If he turn not, he will whet his sword”). This leads to further complications in the following verses, as it is not clear whether the speaker is referring to God or the wicked person. To resolve some of the confusion here, the New Revised Standard Version, for example, gives the following translation, replacing the pronouns of verse 12 with “one” and “God” and subsequent occurrences with “they”: “If one does not repent, God will whet his sword. . . . See how they conceive evil. . . . They make a pit . . . and fall into the hole that they have made.”

When these textual issues are resolved, readers can more readily appreciate David’s colorful and powerful plea for divine deliverance from the attacks of false accusers.

### ***Related verses***

Psalm 18; Luke 3:14; 2 Timothy 3:3; 2 Nephi 1:25; 4:33

### **Psalm 8:4–6**

Psalm 8 is an important psalm that is quoted numerous times in the New Testament. It is seen as a messianic psalm and is considered a hymn of praise as well as a Creation psalm due to its discussion of God’s creation of the cosmos and all living creatures.

“Jehovah our Lord” is praised for His mighty works in the Creation, next to which humankind seems so insignificant. Nevertheless, the psalmist notes, God is mindful of humans, having made them “a little lower than the angels” and “crowned [them] with glory and honour” (verse 5). Note that the Hebrew word translated here as “angels” is *elohim*, which can also be rendered as “God” or “gods.” So, verse 5 may be saying that humans were created to be only a little lower than God, which makes sense in conjunction with verse 6: “Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things

under his feet.” Compare this with God’s own declaration in the Creation: “God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea” (Genesis 1:26).

Jesus quoted verse 2 of this psalm in Matthew 21:16 and after His Resurrection. The Church interpreted the psalm—verses 5 and 6 in particular—to refer specifically to Christ Himself. Hebrews 2 takes the “son of man” from Psalm 8:4 as a reference to Jesus, “who was made a little lower than the angels” when he condescended to come to earth “for the suffering of death,” for which he was “crowned with glory and honour” (Hebrews 2:6–9). The language in Psalm 8:6 regarding having dominion and all things put under his feet is interpreted as Christ’s ultimate victory and sovereignty over all Creation.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Related verses***

Genesis 1:26–28; Psalm 110:1; Daniel 7:13–14; Matthew 28:18; 1 Corinthians 15:24–27; Ephesians 1:20–22; Hebrews 2:6–9

### **Psalm 9:9–14**

Many ancient (especially Greek) manuscripts understand Psalms 9 and 10 to be one psalm. The two psalms together appear to be one complete acrostic poem—in other words, the first letters of each line (in Hebrew) follow the Hebrew alphabet in order (although some letters are missing). Other acrostic psalms include Psalms 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, and 145. Psalms 9–10 is a hymn of thanksgiving (Psalm 9) followed by a lament (Psalm 10).

Psalm 9 can be understood as looking forward to a time when the great day of the Lord will come in which He will sit in judgment over the nations of the world and separate out the righteous from the wicked (verses 4–8). The psalm appears to depict the Second Coming and the subsequent millennial reign of Christ on earth. It will be a time when the Lord dwells in Zion, the blood of the martyrs is avenged, those who have been persecuted and oppressed take refuge in Him, and the poor and needy are cared for (verses 9–14, 17). The Lord judges the wicked individuals and nations and sends them to hell (verses 15–20). Verse 13 may be a reference to the Resurrection.

### ***Related verses***

Psalms 10; 119; 30:3; 86:13

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<sup>5</sup> See Hebrews 2:8; 1 Corinthians 15:27; Ephesians 1:22.

## **Psalm 10:1–2, 16–18**

If Psalm 9 is a song of praise and thanks looking forward to the day when the Lord will reign over the earth in righteousness from Zion, Psalm 10 is the painful acknowledgment that that great day has not yet arrived and that wickedness is still found abundantly in this world. God has not yet fully brought justice upon the enemies of His people, and the wicked do not appear to be particularly concerned about His future judgments. As the International Standard Version renders verse 4, “with haughty arrogance, the wicked thinks, ‘God will not seek justice.’ He always presumes ‘There is no God.’” However, as the psalmist recalls in verse 16, that day of justice will come: “The Lord is King for ever and ever: the heathen are perished out of his land.” Verses 17–18 return to the more hopeful themes of Psalm 9 and the deliverance that the Righteous King will bring to the poor and oppressed: “Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble . . . to judge the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may no more oppress.”

### ***Related verses***

Psalms 9; 14:1; 53:1; 72:4; 119; Genesis 6:5; Luke 16:25

## **Psalm 11:1–5**

Psalm 11 is a psalm of confidence and trust in the Lord. It conveys a surety that the Lord is in His temple, that He watches over the inhabitants of the Earth, and that although He tries the faith of the righteous, He loves them and will ultimately protect them from the wicked. Compare to the similar sentiments expressed by the Book of Mormon prophet Nephi in 2 Nephi 4:15–35.

Note that Joseph Smith in the Joseph Smith Translation made several modifications to this psalm, making it a clear depiction of the Second Coming of Christ. Also, the rather vague reference in verse 3 to the “foundations” being destroyed is resolved by rewriting the verse to make it the “foundations of the wicked” that are destroyed. The inspired revision reads:

In that day thou shalt come, O Lord; and I will put my trust in thee. Thou shalt say unto thy people, for mine ear hath heard thy voice; thou shalt say unto every soul, Flee unto my mountain; and the righteous shall flee like a bird that is let go from the snare of the fowler.

For the wicked bend their bow; lo, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart, *to destroy their foundation.*

*But the foundations of the wicked shall be destroyed, and what can they do?*

For the Lord, when he shall come into his holy temple, sitting upon God’s throne in heaven, his eyes shall pierce the wicked.

Behold his eyelids *shall* try the children of men, *and he shall redeem the righteous, and they shall be tried*. The Lord *loveth* the righteous, but the wicked, and him that loveth violence, his soul hateth.

### ***Related verses***

Psalms 4; 18; 24; 2 Nephi 4:13–35

### **Psalm 11:7**

The King James Version translates the latter half of Psalm 11:7 in a manner that seems to depict the Lord’s face (countenance) looking upon the upright.

The Hebrew of this verse, however, makes this statement in reverse order, indicating that it is the upright which shall behold the Lord’s face. Some of the other, more modern, English translations follow the Hebrew word order. For example, the New International Version, English Standard Version, Revised Standard Version, and many others have something approximate to “the upright shall behold his face.”

The International Standard Version reads, “The upright will see him face-to-face,” which is reminiscent of Moses 1:2 in the Pearl of Great Price: “And he [Moses] saw God face to face” (see also Deuteronomy 34:10).

### ***Related verses***

Psalms 24:6; 27:4, 8; 105:4; Deuteronomy 34:10; 1 Chronicles 16:11; Moses 1:2, 11, 31

### **Psalm 12:5–6**

Psalm 12 is a lament, a cry for help from the righteous against the (verbal) attacks of the wicked.

Verse 5 features a recurring theme in Psalms—the idea that the Lord is the champion of the poor and needy. The Lord declares that He will “arise” for the specific needs of the poor and needy and that He will “set him in safety from him that puffeth [scoffeth] at him.”

Verse 6 presents the comforting notion that “the words of the Lord are pure words.” Unlike the “flattering” and “proud” words coming from the “double heart” of the wicked (Psalm 12:2–3), the Lord’s promises are pure and sure. He will keep and preserve the righteous poor and needy forever (verse 7).

### ***Related verses***

Psalms 72:4, 12–13; 82:3–4; 86:1; 2 Samuel 22:31; Proverbs 31:9; James 1:8

## **Psalm 13:1–2**

This psalm, like many others, presents the psalmist’s lament to God in the face of perils at the hands of wicked enemies.

This psalm may be of particular interest to Latter-day Saint readers due to its affinities with Joseph Smith’s prayerful lament in Liberty Jail recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 121. Compare Psalm 13:1–2 with Doctrine and Covenants 121:1–2:

O God, where art thou? And where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place? How long shall thy hand be stayed, and thine eye, yea thy pure eye, behold from the eternal heavens the wrongs of thy people and of thy servants, and thine ear be penetrated with their cries?

Whereas Psalm 13 does not record an answer from the Lord, Joseph Smith received an extensive response in Doctrine and Covenants 121 that comforted his troubled heart. The Lord told Joseph in verses 7–9,

My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment; And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high; thou shalt triumph over all thy foes. Thy friends do stand by thee, and they shall hail thee again with warm hearts and friendly hands.

The psalmist, in Psalm 13, had also gained great faith in the Lord, leading him to trust in God’s mercy, and declare: “I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me.”

### ***Related verses***

Deuteronomy 31:17; Psalms 10:1; 35:17; 88:14; 89:46; Lamentations 5:20; Doctrine and Covenants 121

## **Psalm 13:2–6**

This psalm presents the psalmist’s lament to God in the face of perils at the hands of wicked enemies. The language used may be of particular interest to Latter-day Saint readers due to its affinities with Nephi’s Psalm, found in 2 Nephi 4.

Compare, for example, the similarity in wording and meaning in the following phrases:

“How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?” (Psalm 13:2)

“Why should my heart weep and my soul linger in the valley of sorrow, and my flesh waste away, and my strength slacken, because of mine afflictions? . . . Wilt thou deliver me out of the hands of mine enemies?” (2 Nephi 4:26, 31)

“Consider and hear me, O Lord my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death; Lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him; and those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved.” (Psalm 13:3–4)

“O Lord, wilt thou redeem my soul? . . . O Lord, wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness! O Lord, wilt thou make a way for mine escape before mine enemies! Wilt thou make my path straight before me! Wilt thou not place a stumbling block in my way—but that thou wouldst clear my way before me, and hedge not up my way, but the ways of mine enemy.” (2 Nephi 4:31, 33)

“But I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me.” (Psalm 13:5–6)

“And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins; nevertheless, I know in whom I have trusted. My God hath been my support; he hath led me through mine afflictions in the wilderness; and he hath preserved me upon the waters of the great deep. He hath filled me with his love, even unto the consuming of my flesh.” (2 Nephi 4:19–21)

**Related verses**

Psalms 9:13; 18:28; 31:7–10; 36:7; 42:9; 77:2–12; 116:3; 1 Samuel 2:1; Jeremiah 1:19

**Psalm 14:1–7**

As was the case with Psalm 11, the Joseph Smith Translation provides a significant rewording of Psalm 14. See a comparison of three versions of this psalm below, including the Joseph Smith Translation and Psalm 53, which is another version of the same psalm within the book of Psalms.

Psalm 14	Joseph Smith Translation Psalm 14	Psalm 53
1 The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good.	1 The fool hath said in his heart, <i>There is no man that hath seen God. Because he showeth himself not unto us, therefore there is no God. Behold, they are corrupt; they have done abominable works, and none of them doeth good.</i>	1 The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. Corrupt are they, and have done abominable <u>iniquity</u> : there is none that doeth good.

<p>2 The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God.</p>	<p>2 For the Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, and by his voice said unto his servant, Seek ye among the children of men, to see if there are any that do understand God. And he opened his mouth unto the Lord, and said, Behold, all these who say they are thine.</p>	<p>2 God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God.</p>
<p>3 They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.</p>	<p>3 <i>The Lord answered, and said, They are all gone aside, they are together become filthy, thou canst behold none of them that are doing good, no, not one.</i></p>	<p>3 <u>Every one of them is gone back</u>: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.</p>
<p>4 Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge? who eat up my people as they eat bread, and call not upon the Lord.</p>	<p>4 <i>All they have for their teachers are workers of iniquity, and there is no knowledge in them. They are they who eat up my people. They eat bread and call not upon the Lord.</i></p>	<p>4 Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge? who eat up my people as they eat bread: they have not called upon God.</p>
<p>5 There were they in great fear: for God is in the generation of the righteous.</p>	<p>5 They are in great fear, for God dwells in the generation of the righteous. He is the counsel of the poor, because they are ashamed of the wicked, and flee unto the Lord, for their refuge.</p>	<p>5 There were they in great fear, where no fear was: for God hath scattered the bones of him that encampeth against thee:</p>

6 Ye have shamed the counsel of the poor, because the Lord is his refuge.	6 They are <i>ashamed of</i> the counsel of the poor because the Lord is his refuge.	thou hast put them to shame, because God hath despised them.
7 Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! when the Lord bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad.	7 Oh that <i>Zion were established out of heaven</i> , the salvation of Israel. <i>O Lord, when wilt thou establish Zion?</i> When the Lord bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, Israel shall be glad.	6 Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When God bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad.

In verse 1, the Joseph Smith Translation adds a more detailed reason for the atheistic reasoning of “the fool.” The reason why he thinks there is no God is that he has not seen God and, by extension, concludes that no person has.

The Joseph Smith Translation creates a dialogue in verse 2 between the Lord and His anonymous prophet, in which the Lord asks the prophet to seek out any people who understand God. The prophet responds to the Lord that there are such people in the world—“all these who say they are thine.”

In verse 3, the modifications in the Joseph Smith Translation seem to depict the Lord as informing the prophet that all those who consider themselves to be the Lord’s people have gone astray in apostasy and wickedness. The Joseph Smith Translation of verse 4 provides the insight that it is the teachers of the people who have led them astray because they are “workers of iniquity” and have no knowledge.

In verse 5, the Joseph Smith Translation adds clarifying information regarding the title “counsel of the poor” that is introduced only in verse 6 of the King James Version. The “counsel of the poor” refers to God Himself, to whom the poor flee because they are ashamed to be with the wicked. In verse 6, it is the wicked who are ashamed of the Lord.

The Joseph Smith Translation adds some significant material to verse 7 of the psalm. Instead of simply looking for deliverance from evil to come out of Zion, this translation looks forward with hope to the latter-day descent of Enoch’s Zion from heaven.

***Related verses***

Revelation 3:12; 21:2; Ether 13:2–6; Doctrine and Covenants 45:12; Moses 7:63

## **Psalm 15:1–5**

Psalm 15 has been classified as an entrance liturgy or temple entry psalm. Psalm 24 is another psalm of this type. The general form of this type of psalm contains the following elements:

1. the worshippers inquire of the priest as to the qualifications for admission to the holy place (15:1),
2. the priest responds by specifying the requirements (15:2–5), and
3. the priest concludes with a blessing (end of 15:5).

Scholars have noted that there are ten requirements for temple entry listed in this psalm, perhaps following the pattern of the Ten Commandments. The use of the number ten is likely due to practical didactic reasons, including the idea that students could tick off, on their ten fingers, the moral requirements necessary for temple admission. There are five positive qualifications (“walketh uprightly,” “speaketh the truth”) and five negative qualifications (“backbiteth not,” “nor doeth evil”).<sup>6</sup>

Note that the Joseph Smith Translation of Psalm 15:1 adds the words “of Zion” after “thy holy hill.” This addition helps clarify that the psalm’s specific setting is in Zion and that the “holy hill” is Mount Zion, the site of the temple. It is not clear if this specification is meant to signify Jerusalem or the New Jerusalem, but in either location Mount Zion is the name for the site of God’s holy temple (see Psalm 48; Doctrine and Covenants 84:2, 32).

### ***Related verses***

Psalms 24; 48; 68; 125; 118; 122; 132; 2 Nephi 25:16; Alma 5:18–19; Doctrine and Covenants 84:2, 32

## **Psalm 16:8–11**

Psalm 16 has been interpreted as a messianic psalm since at least New Testament times. The Apostle Peter quoted verses 8–11 of the psalm in his inspired speech at Pentecost, seeing in these words prophetic foresight from ancient King David. In Peter’s quotation, David sees the future mortal ministry of Christ, declaring, “I foresaw the Lord” (Acts 2:25, quoting Psalm 16:8), and testifying of His resurrection (Acts 2:31, quoting Psalm 16:10). (The expression “I foresaw” comes from the Septuagint.)

Paul, preaching in a synagogue in Antioch, also quoted from Psalm 16:10: “Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption” (Acts 13:35). Paul went on to argue that David was not speaking of himself in this verse because, as they all knew, David had died “and saw corruption.” He went on to assert, referring to Jesus Christ, that “he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption” (Acts 13:37).

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<sup>6</sup> See Peter C. Craigie and Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 1–50*, 2nd ed., Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2016), 150–151.

Whether we read the above verses as a prophecy of Jesus Christ or apply them to our own mortal situation, these timeless words express the joy that comes with our realization that “my flesh also shall rest in hope” because God will “not leave my soul in hell,” neither will He suffer our bodies to “see corruption” forever because of the resurrection guaranteed by His Son, the Holy One.

### ***Related verses***

Psalms 15:5; 23:4; 49:9, 15; 62:6; 73:23; 86:13; Jonah 2:6; Luke 4:34; 24:44; Acts 2:25–28; 13:35; 1 Corinthians 15:42, 50–54

### **Psalm 17:15**

Psalm 17 reflects a righteous individual’s prayer for protection. The psalmist prays for God to hear him, to behold his innocence, to deliver and protect him. The final verse (verse 15) depicts the speaker as expressing the confidence and faith that due to his righteousness, he will ultimately behold the Lord’s face and see His likeness.

This is a bold expectation but not a unique one in Psalms. To cite just a few of the many examples, Psalms 11:7; 24:6; 27:4, 8; 42:2; 63:2; 105:4 share this confidence that the righteous who seek God’s face will ultimately have the privilege of beholding it. Multiple passages suggest an experience of seeing God’s face in the temple. The word “likeness” (Hebrew *temunah*) at the end of 17:15 can refer to an image or statue (as in Exodus 20:4) or to something similar that *represents* God’s appearance, but it can also refer to God’s own form (as in Numbers 12:8). The reference to the psalmist “awakening” could refer to normal sleep, to sleeping in the temple or temple grounds, or to the Resurrection, after which the psalmist knows he will see God (as in Job 19:26).

Just as seeing God in His temple is a recurring theme in Psalms, so also it is in the latter-day teachings of Joseph Smith. For example, as recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 97:15–16, the Lord revealed through Joseph Smith the following:

And inasmuch as my people build a house unto me in the name of the Lord, and do not suffer any unclean thing to come into it, that it be not defiled, my glory shall rest upon it; yea, and my presence shall be there, for I will come into it, and all the pure in heart that shall come into it shall see God.

### ***Related verses***

Psalms 11:7; 24:6; 27:4, 8; 42:2; 63:2; 105:4; Exodus 20:4; Numbers 12:8; Job 19:26; Doctrine and Covenants 88:67–68; 93:1; 97:15–16

## **Psalm 19:1–6**

Psalm 19 was one of C. S. Lewis’s favorite psalms, about which he wrote, “I take this to be the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world.”<sup>7</sup> The psalm has been categorized as a wisdom hymn, with language sometimes reminiscent of that found in parts of the book of Proverbs.

This psalm can be divided into two sections: a hymn of praise to God as Creator (verses 1–6) and a hymn of praise to God as Lawgiver (verses 7–14). The first half of the psalm, praising God as Creator, emphasizes how nature, specifically the sun and the heavens, testify of the glory of God. The expressions of awe inspired by the majesty of God’s handiwork in this hymn recall the reasoning featured in the prophet Alma’s testimony to Korihor in the Book of Mormon:

The scriptures are laid before thee, yea, and all things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion, yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form do witness that there is a Supreme Creator. (Alma 30:44)

### ***Related verses***

Genesis 1:3–19; Psalms 8:1, 3; 50:6; 74:16; 104:19; Isaiah 40:22; Romans 1:20; 10:18; Alma 30:44

## **Psalm 19:7–14**

As stated in the comments on Psalm 19:1–6, this psalm can be divided into two sections: a hymn of praise to God as Creator (verses 1–6) and a hymn of praise to God as Lawgiver (verses 7–14). As noted, Psalm 19 can be categorized as a wisdom hymn, with language sometimes reminiscent of that found in parts of the book of Proverbs (see also Psalm 119), and this is truer of this second half of the psalm than the first.

For example, compare Psalm 19:7–14 with these lines from Proverbs:

- Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. (Proverbs 3:5)
- For this commandment is a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way to life. (Proverbs 6:23)
- The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. (Proverbs 9:10)

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<sup>7</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt, 1958), 56.

- How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver! (Proverbs 16:16)
- Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he. (Proverbs 29:18)

Note how the psalmist’s reflections on the wonderful wisdom and perfection of God’s law in verses 7–10 cause him to turn his thoughts inward as he considers how his own life measures up to the standard of that law and pleads with the Lord to help him do better (verses 11–14).

### ***Related verses***

Psalm 119:72, 127, 133; Proverbs 3:5; 6:23; 9:10; 15:16; 29:18; 2 Nephi 4:31–32

### **Psalm 20:1–9**

Psalm 20 is a good example of a psalm that is quite clearly liturgical in nature—a hymn that was composed for use in a ritual or ceremony. In this case, the setting of the psalm seems to be a ceremony for the king’s departure for battle. As such, it is often categorized as one of the royal psalms.

The psalm can be divided into three sections:

1. An intercessory prayer of behalf of the king (verses 1–5)
2. A declaration (perhaps after a ritual or divine sign) that God will protect His anointed (verse 6)
3. A song of praise and faith from the congregation (verses 7–9)

The first five verses present a prayer given by the congregation (or a priest/prophet representing the congregation) on behalf of the king. The words “day of trouble,” “defend,” “strengthen,” “banners,” “chariots,” “save,” and so on give the sense that the king is preparing for a battle and his people are praying for God to strengthen and protect him.

Verse 6 appears to be a declaration perhaps by the high priest or prophet of his witness that God will indeed save His anointed king and protect him “with the saving strength of his right hand.” This is a turning point in the psalm, in which something (perhaps a ritual or a divine sign) has given the priest/prophet the assurance (“Now know I”) that God has heard the prayer of the congregation and they can now have faith that their king will have divine protection and be granted victory.

The last three verses are a hymn from the congregation, expressing confidence in the Lord's saving power, which is greater than the chariots and horses of the enemy.

### ***Related verses***

Deuteronomy 3:21–22; 7:18–19; 20:1–4; 31:5–8; Psalms 2; 18:50; 21; 89:20; 110:5; 118:25–26; 138:7; 1 Kings 8:44–45; Habakkuk 3:13; Revelation 11:15

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