

# Kethuvim

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Psalms and Song of Songs

## Writings in general

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Variety of literary types

- Songs: Psalms, Song of Songs, Lamentations
  - Wisdom Literature: Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes
  - Short Stories: Ruth, Esther
  - Historical Narratives: Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah
  - Apocalyptic: Daniel
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## Psalms

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- 150 poems/songs
  - Hebrew title is *tehillim* which means “praises.”
  - “Psalm” comes from Greek *psalmos* a translation of the Hebrew *mizmor*, meaning song sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments
    - < See superscriptions on Psalms 4, 5, 6 (6 also references a tune that the song is to be sung by)
  - *Selah* a Hebrew term found in many psalms is of unknown meaning
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## Authorship(s)

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- Popularly associated with King David, but the phrase “of David” appears in only some psalms and may mean dedicated to David
- Several psalms are attributed to others, e.g., Solomon (72), Korahites (42-49 & 84-85), Asaph (50, 73-83), Ethan (89), and even Moses (90)
- Book is a collection, divided into five parts paralleling the five books of the Torah — note where each book ends with a **doxology**
- Note parallels between Ps. 14 & 53, and 40:13-17 & 70

## Types of Psalms

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- Hymns & Songs of Thanksgiving
  - < Songs of Thanksgiving praise God for a specific deed, e.g. 138
  - < Hymns praise God for God’s characteristics, e.g., 8, 23, 148, 150
    - Psalm 8: note the symmetry which mirrors the theme of order and harmony in God’s creation
- Complaint or Lament — make up about 1/3 of Psalms
  - < Cry of anguish or complaint to God
  - < May be individual or communal
  - < Usually ends with expression of confidence or hope in God’s deliverance, e.g., Psalm 22 — exceptions 39 & 88

## Types of Psalms (cont.)

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- Torah or Wisdom Songs
  - < Purpose is mainly to instruct, e.g., about the Torah, mortality, righteousness
  - < Ps. 119 — “acrostic” wisdom song, each eight verses begins with a letter corresponding to Hebrew alphabet
- Other Types?
  - < Royal Songs, perhaps Ps. 2
  - < Liturgical psalms, perhaps Ps. 24
  - < Zion psalms, e.g., Ps. 46
  - < Divine kingship, e.g., Ps. 47

## Song of Songs

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### Song of Solomon

- Five Megilloth — Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, and Song of Songs
    - < Each associated with one of five Jewish festivals
    - < Song of Songs associated with Passover
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## Authorship & Date

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- Though often associated with Solomon as suggested by vs. 1, 8:11-12 clearly distinguishes the author from Solomon
  - Date is uncertain since the book appears to be a collection of love songs, some of which may go back to the time of Solomon
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## Literary World

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- Erotic love songs apparently in dialogue form
    - < Surprisingly explicit
    - < God is not explicitly central
  - Sample Verses:
    - < 1:2-4
    - < 2:5-6
    - < 3:1
    - < 4:1-6
    - < 5:2-4
    - < 7:7-9
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## What Was the Original Purpose?

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Four Common Theories:

- Written as a drama with 2 or more characters
  - < Problem: not clear what the plot of the drama is
- A collection of wedding songs to be used at different stages in marriage ceremony lasting a week (based upon 19th century anthropological observations in Middle East)
  - < Problem: would 19th century CE practices be similar to 6th century CE (or earlier) practices?
- Fertility cult ritual picked up by Hebrews
  - < Problem: why take over a pagan ritual?
- Simply an anthology of love songs, with no particular organization (popular view today)

## Problem of Interpretation

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(Bandstra 447)

- Traditional View is allegorical (Bernard of Clariveux)
  - Some modern theologians suggest an “sacramental” or “incarnational” view (Greely)
  - Simply a celebration of physical love as gift from God (Laffey)
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