

David as a Poet in Psalms: David's relationship with God through his Poetry

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## Introduction

King David was known to be many things. This paper is going to look at David as a poet and the characteristics we see of David and his relationship with God through his poetry. The Psalms give a beautiful picture of the intimacy between David and God. The purpose of this paper will also be to further understand the aspects of poetry within the Psalms- what makes it poetry? The literature reviewed for this article includes articles and dissertations over David. The articles range from authors dissecting specific psalms and their meanings to looking at David in other titles like: conqueror, murderer, shepherd. In Jerome Skinner's dissertation, knowledge of the different aspects of poetry within the Psalms will be used within this paper. Limitations of this paper include that of: the people mentioned are from the past and all accounts of them are based off on the bible. This is a limitation because all the sources used for this paper, do not contain any firsthand accounts. Another limitation is that some background knowledge of King David is necessary for this paper, the paper will give a mild background to David but does not include all aspects needed for an understanding of King David. Since this paper is based more on his poetry rather than his kingship, it is important to have an understanding of David to really see the intimacy with God through his poetry.

## David

Who is David? When hearing the name David, the regular response to this question is that he was one of most prominent kings of Judah and Israel in the Hebrew bible. Although,

David's journey is a bit more complicated than that. <sup>1</sup>David has many titles. Shepherd. Brother. Son. Husband. King. Adulterer. Murderer. Conqueror. Poet. Father. David is the son of Jesse, he is the second to the youngest son. When the prophet Solomon went to visit Jesse while looking for Israel's next king, he greeted his seven sons. Although, Solomon asked Jesse if all his sons were present, and Jesse responded that, no David was out caring to the sheep. Solomon wanted to meet David, and from there David was anointed and would start his journey of becoming king of Israel. Shepherd was David's first title, and he was an attentive shepherd. He never left a sheep behind and cared for his flock more genuinely than most. Soon after this anointing, David goes to the Valley of Elah, where his brothers, the current king, Saul, and the army of Judah were fighting the Philistines. While there, David, the young shepherd boy, took down one of Judah's fiercest enemies: Goliath the giant. This is just the beginning of David's next title: Conqueror. <sup>2</sup> While King, David conquered many enemies and continued to help Judah grow, expand, and prosper. Upon becoming King, David married Michal, the princess of Israel, uniting Israel and Judah and adding "husband" to the titles that he held. David would continue on to have many wives and many children. Some of David's most noted children are Absalom—who would eventually revolt and try to kill David and Solomon—who would eventually become another great king of Judah. <sup>3</sup> David would be labeled as many other things

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<sup>1</sup> Hamilton, Adam *David: Shepherd, Warrior, Poet & King*. Leewood, April 15, 2019.  
<https://cor.org/leewood/sermon-series/david-shepherd-warrior-poet-king>.

<sup>2</sup> Soloveichik, Meir Y. *King David*. New York, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Quayle Bible Collection. *King David: Poet, Warrior, Seducer, and Murderer*. September 5, 2016.

throughout his time as King. In the book of second Samuel is where we see David as many of these titles, but when we go to the book of Psalms we get a very different picture of David. The picture of David as a poet. David wrote the book of Psalms in the Hebrew bible. Throughout the book of Psalms, many poems are ranging from all topics and emotions. The purpose of this paper is to look deeper at some of these Psalms to further understand the relationship between David and God.

### David's life through the Psalms

Within the book of Psalms, many different chapters paint a picture of David's life. This section will follow major events in David life, by going through a few of the Psalms. It is important to note that the Psalms teach us a lot about David's journey. The specific events connected with some of his Psalms, are not always easily seen. By looking at the deeper meanings behind David's poetry we can obtain quite the significant picture of David. In chapter three David is calling out to God in his time of need against his enemies. "O Lord, I have so many enemies; so many are against me. So many are saying, "God will never rescue him!" This chapter is David's prayer to God calling for help against his enemies, we see that closeness in their relationship through David immediate call for God in his time of need but we also get a better picture of David – seeing his enemies and the fear in the people of Judah. In Psalms seven, David is praying for deliverance from his enemies. David has multiple prayers in Psalms praying for this, it is important to note Psalms seven, because David is completely drained in it.

He asks the lord to let his enemies take him, although through his pain, at the end he still praises God. In Psalms 18, David is singing his praises to God for delivering him from the hands of Saul. In chapter 34, David pretended to be mad in front of Abimelech to the point where Abimelech actually drove him away. David discusses how the lord is near to his people and will always protect his people. David is praising God throughout the unknown times yet again. In Psalms 51, David begs for forgiveness for his sins with Bathsheba. Psalms 63 is David praising God, joyfully for his great power and glory. This chapter was written when David was hiding in the Judean wilderness. David shows his love for God even during his most trying times. We can continue to follow Psalms and create quite the broad picture of David's life, seeing his struggles, successes, and praises. Although, a main part of the Psalms is all about David and his journey through prayer.

### Poetry and Prayer

Reading through Psalms, it can be seen that a large part of Psalms is David praying to God. David's prayers are the perfect example of his poetry. The first prayer in Psalms can be seen in Psalms 5, where David is praying for guidance. David is praying for guidance of what to do with the sinful people he was surrounded with in his Kingdom. David is asking God to bless the righteous and bring them joy and prosperity. David continues to use poetry as a way to pray to God completely through the Psalms. David uses prayer to not only ask God for help, but to praise him. David praises God all throughout the Psalms, great examples of this praise are in Psalms 92 and Psalms 118. In Psalms 92 David not only uses Parnellism between music, the flute to be exact, and Gods faithfulness to his people; but David also uses imagery when explaining the righteous. In Psalms 118 David is praising God's everlasting mercy. David uses

Psalms 118 to give his people an image of feeling completely hopeless but seeing God will always have mercy and continue to provide for him and his people.

### What makes Psalms poetry?

The Psalms are considered poetry, but why? The verses in Psalms are considered poetry due to their structure, imagery, and Parallelism. <sup>4</sup> Throughout the Psalms, we see all kinds of imagery being displayed. David is showing imagery of the social, political, and cultural dynamics within being King of Israel and Judah. Poetic language is used to show temporal and spatial aspects of kingship. David paints images of his struggles and his pain in Psalms. We see David call out to God throughout his Psalms. In Psalms three we see David discussing fleeing from his enemies and the pain he is feeling with that, this can be connected to 2 Samuel 15-18, where the story of Absalom's revolt is explained. There is a lot of parallelism between Psalms and first and second Samuel. Another example of this is in Psalms 57 and 142, both of these chapters were written when David was hiding from Saul in the Judean caves. They are parallel due to the fact that one is a prayer for protection against his enemies and one is David pleading for relief from his pain and persecutors, but were written about the same situation whilst he was in the caves. The structure of poetry is the different aspects within the poems. <sup>5</sup> An example of structure is in Psalms 8, where we witness David compare and contrast the insignificance of

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<sup>4</sup> Skinner, Jerome. *The Historical Superscriptions of Davidic Psalms: An Exegetical, Intertextual, and Methodological Analysis*. Michigan: Berrien Springs, 2016.

<sup>5</sup>Bookless, Dave. *King David- eco – poet*. June 30, 2014. <https://blog.arocha.org/en/king-david-eco-poet/>

humans in the overall world with God's choice to let humanity watch over and protect his creation. Chapter 8 begins with discussing the greatness of God. Verse 4 says "What is man that you are mindful of him.." Verse six follows with "You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands." Comparing and contrasting the unworthiness of mankind with the worthiness God grants mankind is an aspect of structure within poetry.

<sup>6</sup>Hebrew poetry is replete with imagery, imagery that touches the emotions and engages the mind, that pictures concrete actions, and that creates associations. Patterns in the poems are linear (e.g., Pss. 104:27–30; 150:1–6), parallel (e.g., Pss. 19:2; 100:1–5), or symmetrical (e.g., Pss. 6:9; 70:1–5). The psalms are for instruction in happiness, which is attainable only by holiness. Their overarching message is the kingship of God and the fact that man's destiny is glory. Other themes include the Lord as refuge and blessings for the nations.

Imagery can be very clearly seen in Psalms 104- the chapter about creation and just how beautiful it is. Psalms 104 is one of the more interesting Psalms in the fact that it does not actually connect to David's life or what was happening in the current times. The entire chapter is a beautiful example of imagery, David goes into detail about different aspects of God's creation- like the moon, sun, mountains, trees, etc.

Psalms 104: 5-9

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<sup>6</sup> Futuro, Mark. *Interpreting the Psalms*. Tablet. September 6, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> He set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved.

<sup>6</sup> You covered it with the watery depths as with a garment;  
the waters stood above the mountains.

<sup>7</sup> But at your rebuke the waters fled,  
at the sound of your thunder they took to flight;

<sup>8</sup> they flowed over the mountains,  
they went down into the valleys,  
to the place you assigned for them.

<sup>9</sup> You set a boundary they cannot cross;  
never again will they cover the earth.

In this Psalm we see David use imagery to create a beautiful picture of the rivers flowing down the mountains into the valleys. David continues to praise God for his beautiful creation. The entire Psalms 104 is something to look at for a better understanding of imagery within David's poems and also the love and appreciation David has for God. An interesting part of Psalms 104 is that David discusses the lions in verse 21 while praising creation. <sup>5</sup>This section of Psalms 104 also is parallel to David's youth. David used to hunt lions when he was younger, which was seen as a culture shock to his fellow people. David is addressing that the lions are also cared for by God, and that the night was made for them just as much as it was made for us. <sup>8</sup>David used

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<sup>5</sup> Bookless, Dave. *King David- eco – poet*. June 30, 2014. <https://blog.arocha.org/en/king-david-eco-poet/>

<sup>8</sup> Stafford, Tim. *David: The Poet*. April, 23, 2014.

poetry to try to connect his people with God. David uses imagery in Psalms 103 to try to show his people the immense love and mercy God has for them.

### Conclusion

Psalms is a book of praise, sorrow, and prayer. David's life as a shepherd, conqueror, husband, king, and many more titles can be seen throughout the Psalms. David wrote the Psalms to connect his people, Israel and Judah, to his God. David's intimacy and relationship with God ran very deep, he had extreme love for God and faith. It can be seen that, no matter the mistakes David made, he was still the apple of God's eye. Looking at the different aspects of the Psalms, it is clear that they are poetry, containing structure, parallelism, and a lot of imagery. To this day, David's poetry draws people closer to God and is often a favorite part of the bible among Christians.

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