

Introductions

Lesson 1 – Name of Book, Structure

Goal:

Students should begin to think about various aspects of Tehillim as whole so that when they learn individual Mizmorim they will have a sense of where it falls within the Sefer.

Activity:

1. **Name:** Explain the derivation of the two names of this book. In Hebrew, this book is called ספר תהלים or just תהלים (plural of תהילה). In the Talmud it is abbreviated to תלים. This name comes from the root הלל which is also the root of הללויה. The English name Psalms comes from the Greek name of the book in the Septuagint (the translation made by the Jews of Egypt in the second century BCE) which is a translation of the word מזמר, meaning “a song.” In Hebrew, we also refer to each individual psalm as a מזמר and not as a perek.

2. **Discussion:** Ask students what they know about Sefer Tehillim. The purpose of this exercise is not to teach right and wrong answers yet but rather to get students thinking about the various issues connected with grasping Sefer Tehillim as a whole. Freely discuss the following: *Who wrote it? How do you know? Were all the Mizmorim written at once or over a long period of time? Were they written down right away or transmitted orally?* Even if there were some written versions, most people would not have access to them since writing was very expensive. Most people would memorize them and recite them by heart. *Is the author the same person as the final editor? What genre is it? Is it poetry? What are the poems about?* Most of them are praises, prayers, and thanks. Some psalms combine these themes and others don't fit neatly into any of these categories. Ps 1. is simply a statement about righteousness – a piece of wisdom directed from a sage to a student. Ps 150 is all praise. *Is it prophetic and what does that mean? Are the words of the book directed from man to God or from God to man?* Unlike most of Tanakh which is God's words directed to man, Tehillim are man's words directed to God. *Is there any order to the psalms or could you mix them up without losing anything?* It is not easy to discern any simple chronological or thematic order. However, there are groups of psalms that hold together such as the Shir haMa'a lot. There are also often linguistic connections from one Mizmor to the next.

3. **Five Books:** Now show the students some of the formal aspects of the book. The whole Sefer is split up into five books. Look at 41:14. Look for an indication in the Tanakh that the second book begins with 42:1 such as ספר שני written in the margin. Compare 41:14 with 72:18-20; 89:53; & 106:48. Have students write them on the board:

תהלים פרק מא (יד) בְּרוּךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִהַעוֹלָם וְעַד הָעוֹלָם אָמֵן וְאָמֵן :
תהלים פרק עב
(יח) בְּרוּךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵים אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲשֵׂה נִפְלְאוֹת לְבָדוֹ :
(יט) וּבְרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹדוֹ לְעוֹלָם וְיִמְלֹא כְבוֹדוֹ אֶת כָּל הָאָרֶץ אָמֵן וְאָמֵן :
(כ) כָּלֹ תִפְלוֹת דָּוִד בְּן יִשָּׁי :
תהלים פרק פט (נג) בְּרוּךְ יְיָ לְעוֹלָם אָמֵן וְאָמֵן :
תהלים פרק קנ (מח) בְּרוּךְ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן הָעוֹלָם וְעַד הָעוֹלָם וְאָמֵר כָּל הָעָם אָמֵן הִלְלוּ יְהוָה :

Notice how all of these pesukim are very similar. Each of them indicates the conclusion of one book of Tehillim. Why is the Sefer split up into five books? There is one hint in 72:20. *What does this mean that this is the end of David's songs if the whole book is made up of his songs?* In order to answer this question we need to analyze the psalm headings.

5. Have the class analyze the headings together. Some Mizmorim have no heading at all such as Pss 1 and 2. These psalms without a heading (anonymous psalms) are found at the beginning and end of Tehillim and also some in between. When they occur within Tehillim they often indicate that the Mizmor is attached to the one before it. Such is the case with Ps 10 which continues Ps 9 (in the Septuagint they are counted as one).

Ask students to find the first psalm which has a heading but which does not mention the name of David in the heading. It turns out to be 42 – the first psalm of book 2. Once they get the hang of it, have them continue scanning all the headings looking for patterns and groups. They should notice the following: Book 1 is all לדוד. Book 2 begins with 7 לבני קרח Mizmorim followed by 1 לאסף, and the rest are all לדוד. Book three has 11 לאסף Mizmorim, 4 לבני קרח, and a couple of others. Book 4 does not have any dominant pattern except for a couple of שירי חדש and ברכי נפשי headings. Book 5 contains a long section of שירי המעלות, 9 הללויה headings (the word הללויה never occurs in the first three books), and a small group of לדוד Mizmorim. See summary sheet.

Now we can understand why Ps 72 ends with the words “Here end of songs of David.” Almost all of the David psalms are concentrated in Books 1 and 2 while only a few are scattered in the last three books. Books 1 and 2 are collections of David psalms. What emerges from this analysis is that there are a number of groups of Mizmorim (לדוד, הללויה, שירי המעלות, לאסף, לבני קרח) which may originally have been independent units. These units came together to form books and the books came together to form the whole of Sefer Tehillim. Tehillim is therefore a collection or anthology of Mizmorim.

It is likely that there were many more poems written by David and others over the centuries which are not included in Tehillim. In fact, Sefer Shemuel includes three poems of David that are not recorded in Tehillim. Tehillim includes only those prayers and songs which have lasting significance. It will be our job to discover what about Tehillim makes it able to inspire so many people throughout so many generations.

Further Analysis:

Ask students to split up into pairs. One partner should open up to Mizmor 14 and the other to Mizmor 53. The first partner should read his/her while the other follows along in Mizmor 53. They should immediately notice that they are parallel Mizmorim. As they read, the second partner should point out any differences between the two. Ask them to try and figure out why there should be two of the same Mizmor within Tehillim and why they are slightly different.

After 5-10 minutes go over the findings together. Ask: *Of the five books of Tehillim where does Mizmor 14 fall? Book 1. In which book is Ps 53? Book 2. How can we explain their repetition?* Perhaps each book was originally an independent unit and they both contained this Mizmor. When all the books were attached to create Sefer Tehillim we ended up with some duplications. There are a few more parallel Mizmorim in Tehillim which also fall out in different books (40:14-18 (book 1) = 70 (book 2); 57:8-12 + 60:7-14 (book 2) = 108 (book 5)). *Why are they not exactly the same?* Over the course of centuries of oral and written transmission slight changes enter the text. Neither Mizmor is necessarily correct or incorrect, they are simply variations which occur in different locations and traditions.

There is one set of differences between these two Mizmorim which is particularly striking. Each time God's name appears in Mizmor 14 as YHVH, (vv 1, 6, 7), Mizmor 53 has Elokim. This change can be explained by looking at the use of God's names throughout Sefer Tehillim. If one counts the number of times God's name appears as YHVH or Elokim in each Mizmor, one finds an amazing pattern. This pattern can be seen in the bar graph below. Each line represents the number of times that name of God occurs in each Mizmor (Mizmor 1 is on the far left and Mizmor 150 on the far right). Within Mizmorim 42-83 the name Elokim occurs 210 times while YHVH occurs only 45 times. Within the rest of the Sefer YHVH occurs 584 times while Elokim appears only 94 times. Therefore the change from YHVH in Mizmor 14 to Elokim in Mizmor 53 is part of a larger pattern of use of God's name. We don't yet have any adequate explanation for these patterns but they do reveal a complex history of the Sefer. With this realization we can describe the characteristics of each of the five books of Tehillim as follows:

Structure of Sefer Tehillim

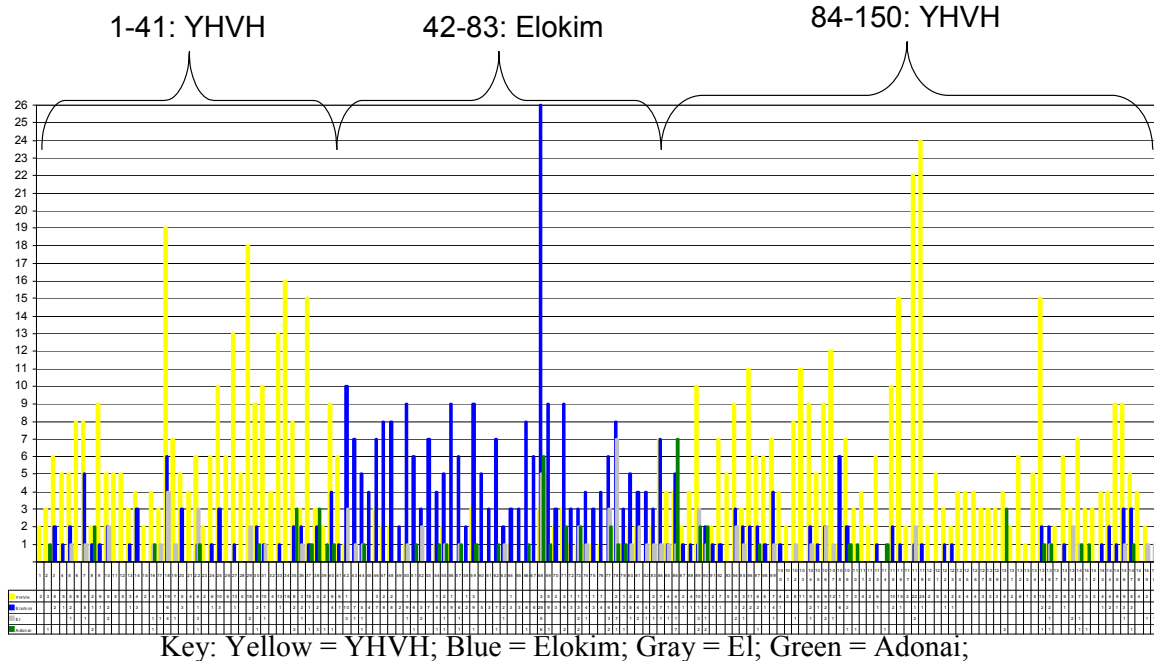
1-41 – Book 1, YHWH Mizmorim from a Davidic collection, mostly prayers

42-72 – Book 2, Elokim Mizmorim from a Davidic Bnei Korah collections, mostly prayers

73- 89 – Book 3, Elokim Mizmorim from Asaf collection and YHVH Mizmorim from Bnei Korah collection, mostly prayers

90-150 – Books 4 &5, mostly praise and thanksgiving (Halleluyah only in this section)

YHVH & Elokim in Tehillim



Ps 14 (in book 1) = Ps 53 (in book 2)

תהלים פרק יד	תהלים פרק נג
(א) לְמַנְצֵחַ לְדָוִד	(א) לְמַנְצֵחַ עַל מַחְלַת מִשְׁכִּיל לְדָוִד :
אָמַר נָבֵל בְּלִבּוֹ אֵין אֱלֹהִים הַשְּׁחִיתוּ הַתְּעִיבוּ עַל־יָדָה אֵין עֲשֵׂה טוֹב :	(ב) אָמַר נָבֵל בְּלִבּוֹ אֵין אֱלֹהִים הַשְּׁחִיתוּ הַתְּעִיבוּ עַל־יָדָה אֵין עֲשֵׂה טוֹב :
(ב) יְדֹד מִשְׁמַיִם הַשְׁקִיף עַל בְּנֵי אָדָם לְרֵאוֹת הַיֵּשׁ מִשְׁכִּיל דִּרְשׁ אֶת אֱלֹהִים :	(ג) אֱלֹהִים מִשְׁמַיִם הַשְׁקִיף עַל בְּנֵי אָדָם לְרֵאוֹת הַיֵּשׁ מִשְׁכִּיל דִּרְשׁ אֶת אֱלֹהִים :
(ג) הַכֹּל סֵר יַחְדָּו נֶאֱלָחוּ אֵין עֲשֵׂה טוֹב אֵין גַּם אֶחָד :	(ד) כָּל־סֵג יַחְדָּו נֶאֱלָחוּ אֵין עֲשֵׂה טוֹב אֵין גַּם אֶחָד :
(ד) הֲלֹא יָדְעוּ כָּל פְּעֻלֵי אֲוֹן אֲכָלֵי עֲמִי אָכְלוּ לֶחֶם יְדֹד לֹא קִרְאוּ :	(ה) הֲלֹא יָדְעוּ פְּעֻלֵי אֲוֹן אֲכָלֵי עֲמִי אָכְלוּ לֶחֶם אֱלֹהִים לֹא קִרְאוּ :
(ה) שֵׁם פָּחַדוּ פָּחַד כִּי אֱלֹהִים בְּדוֹר צַדִּיק : (ו) עֲצַת עֵינֵי תְבִישׁוּ כִּי יְדֹד מַחְסֵהוּ :	(ו) שֵׁם פָּחַדוּ פָּחַד לֹא הָיָה פָּחַד כִּי אֱלֹהִים פֶּאֶר עֲצֻמוֹת חוֹנֵךְ הַבְּשֻׁתָה כִּי אֱלֹהִים מֵאֶסֶם :
(ז) מִי יִתֵּן מִצִּיּוֹן יְשׁוּעַת יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּשׁוּב אֱלֹהִים שְׁבוֹת עֲמוֹ יְגַל יַעֲקֹב יִשְׁמַח יִשְׂרָאֵל :	(ז) מִי יִתֵּן מִצִּיּוֹן יְשׁוּעַת יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּשׁוּב יְדֹד שְׁבוֹת עֲמוֹ יְגַל יַעֲקֹב יִשְׁמַח יִשְׂרָאֵל :