

## **What Are The Psalms?**

In a typical liturgical worship service, a Christian congregation may sing songs that were written over one thousand years ago, others that were written over five hundred years ago, others that were written over one hundred years ago, and still others that were written over the last several years. The oldest songs a Christian congregation may sing in a typical liturgical worship service were written around three thousand years ago. These songs are called psalms. In this column entitled, "Questions About Christianity", we are looking at the different parts of a basic Christian liturgical worship service. This month we will learn about the psalms by answering this question, "What are the psalms?"

Psalms come from the Old Testament book of the Bible called Psalm. Old Testament Jews originally called this book "Songs of Praise" because this was their hymnbook. This book was renamed Psalm by the Septuagint. The Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Old Testament that was written around the third-second century B.C. The authors of the book of Psalm include: Moses, King David, King Solomon, the sons of Korah, Asaph, Ethan the Ezrahite, Jeduthun, Heman the Ezrahite, and others who are not identified. King David wrote the most psalms. He wrote seventy-three psalms we know of for sure. Jewish tradition says he wrote many other psalms as well. The oldest psalm was written by Moses around 1,400 B.C. and the newest psalm was written around 500 B.C. Many believe a Jewish rabbi or teacher named Ezra who lived in the land of Israel around 500 B.C. arranged the book of Psalm into the five parts that are found in most Bibles.

There are different classifications of psalms in the book of Psalm including psalms, song, prayer, miktam, maskil, and others. The main content of the book of Psalm include Messianic psalms (Psalms about the promised Savior), imprecatory psalms (Psalms against one's enemy), Hallel (Psalms which were sung during Jewish festivals), and songs of ascent (Psalms which some believe people sang as they were going up to Jerusalem for a festival, or to the temple to worship). Since the book of Psalm was the Old Testament Jewish hymnbook, Jews often sang psalms on their own. They also sang them at the temple where the psalms were played by flutes, strings, and other musical instruments when they worshipped God.

Today many Christian congregations still sing psalms in their worship service. They have been arranged in a vast array of musical settings so they can be played by many different types of musical instruments. Christian congregations sing psalms to beautify their worship service and praise God. They also sing them because of the psalms' very comforting message, especially about the coming of the promised Savior, Jesus.