

# KEY TERMS & TENSES IN THE PSALMS

## Overview

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## I. The Meanings of 50 Key Words in the Psalms

1. “The **righteous**” (*ṣāddîq*): *those who live the right way*

Psalm 1:6:

“For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous (= those who live the right way), but the way of the wicked will perish.”

2. “The **wicked**” (*rāšā'*): *those who live the wrong way*

Psalm 1:4:

“Not so the wicked (= those who live the wrong way)! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.”

3. “**Evil**” (*rā'*): (1) *wrongdoing, wickedness, immorality*; (2) *calamity, trouble, danger, harm*

Psalm 23:4b:

“I will fear no evil (= trouble/danger).”

Psalm 34:14a:

“Turn from evil (= wrongdoing) and do good.”

Psalm 34:19:

“Many are the afflictions (= troubles/calamities) of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all.”

4. “**Mercy**” (KJV), or “**lovingkindness**” (NASB), or “**steadfast love**” (NIV) (*ḥesēd*): *kindness, love* (like the Greek *agape*; love in action, not love as a feeling)

Psalm 23:6a:

“Surely goodness and mercy (= kindness) will follow me.”

Psalm 103:8a:

“The LORD is abounding in mercy (= love) . . . .”

5. “**Endureth forever**” (*le 'ôlām*): *is infinite, vast, immeasurable, inexhaustible, beyond all measure*

Psalm 136:1b:

“His mercy (= love) endureth forever (= is vast/immeasurable).”

Psalm 100:5

“For the LORD is good and his love endures forever (= is vast/immeasurable); his faithfulness continues through all generations.”

6. “**Blessed**” (*'ašrê*): *how fortunate, how favored* (not really “happy”)

Psalm 1:1a:

“Blessed (= how fortunate) is the one who . . . .”

7. **“Rock”** (*šûr; sělá*): *lofty mountain refuge, elevated section of rock, often used for hiding, protection*

Psalm 18:2a

“The LORD is my rock (= my lofty mountain refuge) and my fortress . . . .”

Psalm 18:31b

“And who is a rock (= lofty mountain protection), except our God?”

8. **“Stronghold”** (*mišgāb*): *lofty mountain refuge, fortress, hideout, secure place*

Psalm 18:2

“The LORD is . . . my stronghold (= my lofty mountain refuge/secure place).”

9. **“Horn”** (*qěrēn*): (1) *lofty mountain refuge, place of safety*; (2) *head*; (not really “strength”)

Psalm 18:2

“The LORD is . . . the horn of my salvation (= the mountain refuge where I find deliverance).”

Psalm 75:5

“Do not lift your horn (= head) against heaven, or speak with a haughty neck.”

Psalm 75:10b

“The horns (= heads) of the righteous will be lifted up.”

10. **“Bless”** (*bārāk*): (1) *express one’s gratitude and admiration or praise*—normally to a superior, such as to God or a king; (2) *be benevolent to someone, to cause good things to happen to, to give good gifts to someone*—normally to a subordinate

Psalm 103:1a

“Bless the LORD, O my soul (= I would like to express to the LORD my gratitude and praise).”

Psalm 67:1

“May God be gracious to us and bless us (= be benevolent to us) and make his face to shine upon us.”

11. **“Fear the LORD”** (*yārē ’et Yahweh*): *to live in reverent submission and obedience to God*

Psalm 34:7a

“The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear (= live in reverent submission and obedience to) him, and delivers him.”

Psalm 103:11

“As the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him (= who live in reverent submission and obedience to) him.”

12. **“Faithfulness”** (*’ěmūnā*): (1) *kindness, care, supportiveness*; (2) *truth, truthfulness, trustworthiness*

Psalm 36:5

“Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness (= kindness/care) to the clouds.”

Psalm 119:86

“All Your commandments are faithful (= truthful/trustworthy) . . . .”

Psalm 96:13b

“He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness (= truth).”

Psalm 89:1

“I will sing of the LORD’S great love forever; with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness (= kindness, care) through all generations.”

13. **“Truth”** (*’ěměť*): (1) *faithfulness, reliability, dependability, loyalty*; (2) possibly *kindness, care, supportiveness* in some contexts; (3) *honesty, integrity*
- Psalm 86:15  
 “But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth (= faithfulness).”
- Psalm 57:3  
 “He will send from heaven and save me; he reproaches him who tramples upon me. *Selah*. God will send forth his lovingkindness and his truth (= kindness/care).”
- Psalm 57:10  
 “For great is your love, reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness (= kindness/care) reaches to the skies.”
- Psalm 51:6a  
 “Surely you desire truth (= honesty/integrity) in the inner parts . . . .”
14. **“Soul”** (*něpěš*): *one’s entire being* (“my soul” = “me” or “I”; not necessarily the nonmaterial part of a person)
- Psalm 34:2a  
 “My soul will boast in the LORD (= I will boast in the LORD).”
- Psalm 3:2  
 “Many are saying of my soul (= me), God will not save him!”
- Psalm 103:1a  
 “Bless the LORD, O my soul (= I would like to express to the LORD my gratitude and praise).”
15. **“Shame”/“be put to shame”** (*bôš*): *defeat, ruin; be brought to defeat, ruin*
- Psalm 25:2b  
 “. . . let me not be put to shame (= let me not be brought to ruin/defeated).”
16. **“Remember”** (*zākār*): *call to mind; think on (and act upon)*
- Psalm 25:6a  
 “Remember (= call to mind and act upon), O LORD, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old.”
- Psalm 25:7a  
 “Do not remember (= do not call to mind and act upon) the sins of my youth . . . .”
17. **“Forget”** (*šakah*): *neglect to call to mind and think on*
- Psalm 103:2  
 “. . . let me not forget (= I will not fail to call to mind) all your acts of kindness.”
18. **“Heart”** (*lēb*): *mind* (the seat of intellect, planning, pondering; not the seat of emotions)
- Psalm 14:1a  
 “The fool says in his heart (= mind), there is no God.”
- Psalm 13:5  
 “I trust in your love; my heart (= mind) rejoices in your salvation.”
- Psalm 16:7  
 “The LORD counsels me; even at night my heart (= mind) instructs me.”

19. **“Have mercy”/“be merciful”** (*ḥānān*): (1) *be gracious to, be kind to, to graciously help someone* (even though undeserving); (2) *to show mercy* (to refrain from punishing someone, even though it is deserved)

Psalm 57:1

“Have mercy on me (= be gracious to me), O God . . . for in you my soul takes refuge.”

Psalm 25:16

“Turn to me and be gracious to me (= help me), for I am lonely and afflicted.”

Psalm 31:9a

“Be merciful to me (= help me), for I am in distress.”

Psalm 41:4

“Be merciful to me (= refrain from punishing me) . . . for I have sinned against you.”

20. **“Tender mercies”/“bowels” or “compassion”** (NIV) (*rāḥmīm*): *love, affection* (this is emotional love, such as a mother has for her child)

Psalm 51:1b

“. . . on the basis of your great compassion (= love/affection), blot out my transgressions.”

Psalm 103:4

“Who surrounds you with his kindness and his tender mercies (= love/ affection).”

21. **“Merciful”/“full of compassion”** (*rāḥūm*): *loving, compassionate* (as a mother to her child)

Psalm 145:8a

“The LORD is gracious and merciful (= compassionate) . . .”

22. **“Love”** (*’āhab*): *treat or consider as important; highly esteem*

Psalm 119:127: “I love (= consider important/highly esteem) your commands, more than I would gold, even pure gold.”

23. **“Hate”** (*śānē*): *treat or consider as unimportant, do not highly esteem*

Psalm 26:5

“I hate (= do not highly esteem) the assembly of evildoers, and I refuse to take my seat with the wicked.”

Psalm 139:21

“I hate (= do not highly esteem) those who hate (= do not esteem) you. . . .”

24. **“For/because”** (*kī*); often this word means **“surely”** rather than “for”

Psalm 3:7b

“Deliver me, O my God! For you will (= may you surely) strike all my enemies on the cheek.”

25. **“Way”** (*dereḳ*): (1) *customary behavior, the way someone behaves/lives*; (2) *one’s life journey, activities*; (3) *acceptable or required behavior*

Psalm 1:1c

“. . . who does not walk in the way of sinners (= who does not live as sinners do)”

Psalm 37:5a

“. . . commit to the LORD all your ways (= everything you do, all your activities) . . . .”

Psalm 139:3b

“. . . you know all my ways (= everything that I do).”

Psalm 103:7

“He made known his ways (= the behaviors he required/found acceptable) to Moses.”

26. “**Deliver**” (*nāšāl*): (1) **to rescue** (from capture); (2) **to protect** (from being captured)

Psalm 34:19

“Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers (= protects/rescues) him from them all.”

Psalm 59:1

“Deliver me (= protect me) from my enemies, O God; give me protection . . . .”

27. “**Redeem**” (*pādā*): originally meant to **rescue someone from financial ruin** by paying off their debts for them, or to **buy someone’s freedom**; but it also came to mean more generally “**to rescue**”

Psalm 25:22

“Redeem (= rescue) Israel, O God, from all their troubles.”

Psalm 49:15a

“God will redeem (= rescue) my life from the grave.”

Psalm 55:18a

“He ransoms (= rescues) me unharmed from the battle.”

28. “**For the sake of**” (*lemā ‘ān*): **in accordance with, in light/view of, on the basis of, in keeping with**

Psalm 6:4b

“Save me because of (= on the basis of) your unfailing love.”

Psalm 143:11a

“For your name’s sake (= in keeping with who you are), rescue me.”

Psalm 27:11

“Because of (= in view of) my oppressors, lead me in a straight path.”

Psalm 23:3

“He leads me along the right paths, for his name’s sake (= in accordance with his name/character).”

29. “**Peace**” (*šālôm*): **well-being, wholeness, welfare**

Psalm 34:14

“Turn from evil and do good; seek peace (= wholeness) and pursue it.”

Psalm 72:3

“May the mountains bring peace (= well-being/welfare) to the people.”

30. “**Take refuge in**” (*hāsā*): **to seek asylum with, to go to for protection or safety**

Psalm 34:22b

“No one will be brought to ruin who takes refuge in you (= comes to you for protection).”

Psalm 16:1

“Keep me safe, O God; for I take refuge in you (= seek asylum/safety with you).”

31. “**Trust in**” (*bātāh*): **to place one’s trust in, to depend on, to count on**

Psalm 13:5a

“But I trust in (= depend on) your love.”

Psalm 52:8b

“I trust in (= depend on) the steadfast love of God forever and ever.”

32. “**Hope**”/“**wait for**” (*qāwā*): **to wait for, to count on, to depend on** (someone, for help)

Psalm 27:14

“Wait for” (= depend on) the LORD; be strong and take heart, and wait for (= place your trust in) the LORD.”

Psalm 25:3a

“No one whose hope is in you (= who places their trust in you) will be disappointed.”

33. “**Turn**”/“**repent**” (*šûb*): **to return**

Psalm 51:13b

“. . . so that sinners will turn (= return) to you.”

34. “**Comfort/repent**” (*nāḥām*): (1) **to make someone feel better, reassure, console**; (2) **to relent**

Psalm 119:76a

“Let your steadfast love comfort (= reassure) me.”

Psalm 23:4b

“Your rod and your staff comfort (= reassure) me.”

Psalm 110:4a

“The LORD has sworn and he will not repent (= relent/take back his word).”

35. “**Blameless**” (*tām; tāmîm*): **morally/ethically whole, upright, above reproach** (does not mean flawless)

Psalm 15:2a

“He whose walk is blameless (upright), and who does what is right . . . .”

36. “**Uphold**” (*sāmāk*): **to support and steady someone by putting one’s arm around him** (to help him along, etc.)

Psalm 37:24

“Though he stumble he will not fall, for the LORD upholds (= supports) him with his hand.”

37. “**Hand**” (*yād*): **forearm and hand**

Psalm 37:24

“Though he stumble he will not fall, for the LORD supports him with his hand (= arm).”

Psalm 31:5a

“Into your hands (= arms) I commit my spirit . . . .”

38. “**Transgressions**” (*pěšā*): **acts of rebellion** (not just inadvertent mistakes)

Psalm 19:13b

“Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression (= acts of rebellion).”

Psalm 51:1b

“. . . according to your great compassion, blot out my transgressions (= acts of rebellion).”

39. “**Blot out**” (*māḥā*): **to erase** (remove by scraping off; used of erasing a name from a scroll)

Psalm 51:1

“. . . blot out (= erase the record of) my acts of rebellion against you.”

40. “**Salvation**” (*yešû ‘ā*): (1) *safety, protection*; (2) *rescue, deliverance*

Psalm 62:1

“My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation (= protection) comes from him.”

Psalm 62:2a

“He alone is my rock and my salvation (= protection), my fortress . . . .”

Psalm 89:26

“You are my Father, my God, the Rock of my Salvation (= the mountain refuge where I am safe).”

41. “**Refuge**” (*māhsēh*): *place of asylum/safety, a place where one goes to find safety and protection*

Psalm 46:1a

“God is our refuge (= place of safety) and our strength.”

Psalm 61:3

“For you have been my refuge (= place of safety), a strong tower against the enemy.”

Psalm 91:2a

“He is my refuge (= place of safety) and my fortress.”

42. “**To crown**” (*‘ātār*): *to surround*

Psalm 103:4b

“. . . who crowns (= surrounds) you with kindness and love.”

43. “**Seek**” (*dāraš*): *to appeal to someone for help or guidance, to go to someone for help*

Psalm 34:4a

“I sought the LORD (= appealed to the LORD for help) and he answered me . . . .”

Psalm 34:10b

“. . . but those who seek the LORD (= appeal to the LORD for help) lack no good thing.”

Psalm 77:2a

“When I was in distress I sought the Lord (= appealed to the Lord for help) . . . .”

44. “**To answer**” (*‘ānā*): often means *to respond with help*

Psalm 34:4a

“I sought the LORD, and he answered me (= responded to me with help).”

Psalm 69:17b

“. . . answer me quickly (= respond to me quickly with help), for I am in trouble.”

Psalm 118:5

“I cried to the LORD and he answered me (= responded to me) by setting me free.”

45. “**Law**” (*tōrāh*): *instruction, teaching*

Psalm 1:2

“. . . but his delight is in the law (= teaching/instruction) of the LORD, and in his law (= teaching/instruction) he meditates day and night.”

46. “**Angels**” (*māl’āk*): *messengers, envoys*

Psalm 91:11

“For he will instruct his angels (= envoys) concerning you, to guard you in all your ways.”

47. “**Shadow of death**” (*šālmāwēṭ*): **complete darkness**

Psalm 23:4a

“Even when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death (= a very dark valley).”

48. “**Name**” (*šēm*): **one’s identity, reputation**; used as a substitution for **one’s self**

Psalm 34:3b

“... let us exalt his name (= him) together.”

Psalm 105:1

“Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name (= him).”

49. “**Despise**” (*bāzā*): **reject, treat as unimportant, consider of little value, look down on**

Psalm 102:17b

“God will not despise (= reject/consider unimportant) their plea.”

Psalm 51:17b

“... a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise (= reject).”

50. “**Glory**” (*kābôḏ*): **splendor, magnificence, majesty, honor**

Psalm 3:3b

“O LORD, you bestow glory (= honor) on me and lift up my head.”

Psalm 19:1a

“The heavens declare the glory (= magnificence) of God.”

## II. A Note on the ‘Imperfect Tense’ in the Psalms

Hebrew has only two “tenses”—perfect and imperfect. Essentially, all finite verbs in the Old Testament are either one or the other.

The **imperfect** generally = **present** (not future); OR a **wish/prayer** (“may he . . .”).

Consequently, verbs in the book of Psalms (and elsewhere) that have been translated as future may actually be intended as:

1. **Present** (e.g., Ps 1:3; 3:6; 9:1; 18:1; 23:1, 4; 91:1-2; 138:1-2)

Psalm 23:4-6

“Even though (= when) I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear (= **I fear**) no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Surely goodness and love will follow me (= **pursue me**) all the days of my life, and I will dwell (= **I dwell**) in the house of the LORD forever.”

Psalm 3:6

“I will not fear (= **I do not fear**) the tens of thousands drawn up against me on every side.”

Psalm 9:1-2

“I will praise you (= **I praise** you), O LORD, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonders. I will be glad and rejoice (= **I am glad and I rejoice**) in you; I will sing (= **I sing**) praise to your name, O Most High.”

Psalm 101:1

“I will sing (= **I sing**) of your love and justice.”

2. **Prayer / wish** (e.g., Ps 72:2-17; 130:8; 138:4-8)

Psalm 72:1-7

“Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness. He will judge (= **may he** judge) your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice. The mountains will (= **may** the mountains) bring prosperity to the people, the hills the fruit of righteousness. He will defend (= **may he** defend) the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; he will crush (= **may he** crush) the oppressor. He will endure (= **may he** endure) as long as the sun, as long as the moon, through all generations. He will be (= **may he** be) like rain falling on a mown field, like showers watering the earth. In his days the righteous will (= **may** the righteous) flourish; prosperity will (= **may** prosperity) abound till the moon is no more.”

Psalm 130:2-4, 7-8

“O LORD, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared. . . . O Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. *He will* (= **may he**) redeem Israel from all their sins.”

### III. A Note on the ‘Attributive Genitive’ in the Psalms

Hebrew has few adjectives (big, glorious, joyous, holy, strong).

1. To modify a noun (*strong arm*), Hebrew often uses another noun that represents the appropriate quality (e.g., *strength*). The second noun is translated with “of”:

“arm of strength”                      (= *strong arm* in English)  
“name of glory”                        (= *glorious name* in English)

2. When the entire expression is further defined by a *possessive pronominal suffix*, the suffix is added, oddly, to the second noun:

“arm of my strength”                  (= my arm of strength = *my strong arm*)  
“name of my glory”                    (= my name of glory = *my glorious name*)

3. Many of these expressions have been mistranslated in English translations of the Psalter. Retranslate the following expressions:

- a. “king of glory” (Ps 24:7)
- b. “sacrifices of joy” (Ps 27:6)
- c. “God of truth” (Ps 31:5)
- d. “paths of righteousness” (Ps 23:2)
- e. “God of my life” (Ps 42:8)
- f. “God of my strength” (Ps 43:2)
- g. “God of my salvation” (Ps 18:46)
- h. “throne of his holiness” (Ps 46:8)
- i. “God of my mercy” (Ps 59:10, 17)
- j. “God of my strength” (Ps 62:7)
- k. “rock of my strength” (Ps 62:7)
- l. cf. “by the word of his power” (Heb 1:3)