Tanakh: King David

Makor at Hebrew College (Grades 6 & 7)

Through the core text of *al shloshah d'varim* (Pirke Avot 1:2), our Tanakh unit is the last of four units (Gemilut Chasidim/Tikkun Olam, Avodah/T'filah, Chagim and Tanakh) in this course. During this class session, students will build a foundation of knowledge of the Book of Psalms and stories surrounding King David through text study, chevruta and multimedia (specifically music and animation). Students will compare, contrast and discuss the text in relation to the modern midrashim presented.

Essential Questions

- Who was King David?
- How is King David portrayed through traditional text vs. modern text?

Materials/Supporting Texts & Sources

- JPS Tanakah (1 Samuel; pp 605-607)
- Text/lyric packet [1/student]
- Raising Cain, Fleeing Egypt, and Fighting Philistines: The Old Testament in Popular Music (McEntire & Emerson)
- Markers [1/student]
- Computer/speaker set-up for music

Schedule and Lesson Plan

00:00-00:05 **Attendance/Check-In**
Trigger question: who is King David? (sample student answers)

00:05-00:20 **Introduction/Background**
Pass out Handout A to students. Breaking students into chevruta, **read 1 Samuel 16-18 in JPS Tanakh (pp605-614)**. Answer right column of Handout A. Discuss as a class when completed.
[Sample answers: gifted, flawed, dysfunctional family, sibling rivalry, administrative, faithful, etc…]

00:20-00:40 **Looking at the Lyrics (in Chevruta)**
As a class, read Handout B together. Once completed, introduce Handout C and sample music.

00:40-00:50 **The Text vs. Today's Music (in Chevruta)**
With their partners, students will identify the ways David is portrayed in the many handouts they read during this class, and whether or not the songs they listened to represent this. Why/why not? Using the original text from the JPS Tanakh, students will compare and contrast the song lyrics with the original texts, and answer the discussion questions in the left column of Handout A. (comparison: classic text vs. modern interpretation/midrash)

00:50-01:00 **Wrap-Up/Clean-Up**
Recap chevruta discussion as a class.

Personal Reflection

In 1 Samuel 16, we find God speaking to Samuel in the process of appointing the next King. After rejecting others, God (via Saul) takes a liking to David based on his musicianship and attentiveness (1 Samuel 16:19-23). Throughout 1 Samuel 17-18, we go on to learn more about David, son of Jesse – an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah. One of eight sons, David exemplifies loyalty, compassion and dedication throughout this part of the text.

While 1 Samuel 16 does not give us great insight to David's musical background, it is said to be the inspiration for much of Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah." This song presents faith and love as central themes, which are consistent throughout the story of King David. It makes reference of David's affair with Bathsheba, as well as the struggle David goes through in defining (and maintaining!) his relationship with God. Focusing on the broader King David Story, Seven Mary Three's "Cumbersome," speaks to the various masks that King David wears throughout his life and specifically during his tenure as King. While taking positive and negative characteristics into account, the song speaks to the obstacles that David overcame – both internally and externally. At times an underdog and other times revered, David took on (and often stuggled with his) many roles throughout the text.

I feel that both of the songs incorporated into this lesson plan succeed in serving as modern texts in connection to the King David story. Both songs are quite popular, and are used in very different settings. "Hallelujah" is very ceremonial and a ballad, while "Cumbersome" is framed in the alternative-rock setting and refers to the balance that is so crucial in life.

You can access the songs through these links:

Hallelujah by Leonard Cohen : http://youtu.be/YrLk4vdY28Q
Cumbersome by Seven Mary Three: http://youtu.be/NjNn4bbbgSw

Handout A

Finding the Text in Today's Music…

Listening to and looking at the song lyrics, please discuss the following questions with your partner:

(1) What are some similarities between the original text and the song lyrics?

(2) How do you think the song lyrics differ from the original text?

(3) Which song do you think most connects to the original texts and stories of King David? Why?

What's In A King?

*The Bible tells the story of David's reign in detail (1 Samuel 16 to 1 Kings 2:11), reflecting its importance as well as its length. David "reigned over Israel for forty years, seven and a half in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem" (c. 1009/1001-969 B.C.E.). His long reign was later regarded as Israel's "golden age"; **David himself was seen as the model king**. David's later glorification may seem paradoxical in light of the fact that he was a Bethlehemite, from the tribe of Judah, and not from any of the original, northern tribes (Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin). Furthermore, David was one of Saul's adversaries, who had been banned because he was considered the personal enemy of the first Israelite king. Moreover, at the time of Saul's death, David was serving as a mercenary in the army of the Philistines, Israel's bitter enemy.* ***(www.myjewishlearning.com)***

Looking at 1 Samuel 16-18 in your JPS Tanakh, create a list of the characteristics King David portrays as shown through the text:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Highlight or circle the pieces of text that show these characteristics.

Discuss with your partner what we can learn from King David, and how this may be relevant to our lives today…

Handout B

Raising Cain, Fleeing Egypt, and Fighting Philistines: The Old Testament in Popular Music

Mark McEntire and Joel Emerson

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Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" exists in many different versions performed by many different singers. It is a song nearly as big and complex as the biblical character who plays a major role in it, King David. The opening verse of the song seems to refer to the story in 1 Samuel 16, when David is brought to the court of King Saul to play his lyre and soothe the mad king. Samuel had secretly anointed David as the next king, so the spirit of God that rests with the king is upon him, and "an evil spirit from the Lord" torments Saul. When David comes to play for Saul, the spirit David possesses drives the evil spirit away from Saul. The opening verse also seems to refer to the tradition of David as the great composer of psalms. Already there is a hint, though, that this relationship between David and God, which is like music, is not simple. David is, according to Cohen, "the baffled king composing Hallelujah." The second verse of the song then launches into the story of David's affair with Bathsheba. Cohen also appears to pull in a fragment of the Samson and Delilah story with his reference to the cutting of hair. The result of David's affair in the song is that "from your lips she drew the hallelujah." The utterance of this illicit hallelujah is a turning point in the song, and the next verse confronts the taking of the name of the Lord "in vain." There have now become two hallelujahs, one "holy" and one "broken." The final verse holds out the hope of redemption, however. Somehow, David's reputation as a faithful king survives all of his missteps in the biblical story, including the affair and the resulting murder of Uriah. Cohen's song switches to first-person voice in the final stanza, apparently portraying David's own words as he struggles to reclaim his connection to God and the meaning of his holy "hallelujah." This attempt to rewrite a failed story with claims of "I did my best" and "I've told the truth" fits the long traditions within Judaism and Christianity of remaking David that began with the cleansing of his image in the book of Chronicles.

Fewer popular songs than one might imagine make use of the David and Goliath story and of the image of the giant-killer that produces many references in other types of popular expression, such as sports broadcasting. A song called "**Cumbersome**," performed by **Seven Mary Three**, makes an enigmatic reference to David and Goliath. In popular thought and conversation, Goliath has come to represent the prohibitive favorite in any kind of contest. As such, he has become a symbol of power, pride, and arrogance. The David of this story represents the underdog, filled with youthful exuberance, lightness of being, and the courage to stand up to power. The voice in "Cumbersome" is a man singing about a relationship with a woman in which he has taken on something of the character of both of these figures. In her eyes he seems to be transforming into Goliath, so that any David-like qualities have become a "mask." The result of this transformation is that his presence has become burdensome to her, heavy like the presence of an armored giant. The song uses the image of stones being thrown that accumulate and build a wall of separation. The singer longs for renewal of the relationship, but it moves inexorably from the lightness of being represented by David to the painful heaviness represented by Goliath. The final verse argues that there might be a proper "balance" between these qualities of lightness and heaviness, but such balance seems irretrievably lost.

Midrash MASH-UP

EXPLORING JEWISH TEXT & HISTORY THROUGH MUSIC & MEDIA

Prophets & Writings:

The King David Story

HALLELUJAH — *LEONARD COHEN*

I've heard there was a secret chord
That David played, and it pleased the Lord
But you don't really care for music, do you?
It goes like this
The fourth, the fifth
The minor fall, the major lift
The baffled king composing Hallelujah

Hallelujah (x4)

Your faith was strong but you needed proof
You saw her bathing on the roof
Her beauty and the moonlight overthrew you
She tied you to a kitchen chair
She broke your throne, and she cut your hair
And from your lips she drew the Hallelujah

Baby I have been here before
I know this room, I've walked this floor
I used to live alone before I knew you.
I've seen your flag on the marble arch
Love is not a victory march
It's a cold and it's a broken Hallelujah

Hallelujah (x4)

There was a time you let me know
What's really going on below
But now you never show it to me, do you?
And remember when I moved in with you
The holy dove was moving too
And every breath we drew was Hallelujah

Hallelujah (x4)

Maybe there's a God above
But all I've ever learned from love was how to shoot at someone who outdrew you
It's not a cry you can hear at night
It's not somebody who has seen the light
It's a cold and it's a broken Hallelujah

Hallelujah (x4)

You say I took the name in vain
I don't even know the name
But if I did, well really, what's it to you?
There's a blaze of light in every word
It doesn't matter which you heard
The holy or the broken Hallelujah

Hallelujah (x4)

I did my best, it wasn't much
I couldn't feel, so I tried to touch
I've told the truth, I didn't come to fool you
And even though it all went wrong
I'll stand before the Lord of Song
With nothing on my tongue but Hallelujah

Hallelujah (x17)

CANDLE — *MATISYAHU*

You light up my lamp; Hashem my God illuminates my darkness.
Rise at midnight and sing songs till the dawn, King David said it best .

CUMBERSOME — *SEVEN MARY THREE*

She calls me Goliath and I wear the David mask
I guess the stones are coming too fast for her now
You know I'd like to believe this nervousness will pass
All the stones that are thrown are building up a wall

I have become cumbersome to this world,
I have become cumbersome to my girl

I'd like to believe we could reconcile the past
Resurrect those bridges with an ancient glance
But my old stone face can't seem to break her down
She remembers bridges, burns them to the ground

I have become cumbersome to this world,
I have become cumbersome to my girl

Too heavy too light, too black or too white, too wrong or too right
Today or tonight, cumbersome
Too rich too poor, she's wanting me less and I'm wanting her more
The bitter taste is cumbersome

No yeah, No no no yeah (x2)

There is a balance between two worlds,
one with an arrow and a cross
Regardless of the balance life has become cumbersome

Too heavy too light, too black or too white, too wrong or too right
Today or tonight, cumbersome
Too rich too poor, she's wanting me less and I'm wanting her more
The bitter taste is cumbersome

No yeah, No no no yeah (x2)
Yeah yeah no no no yeah
No life has been cumbersome

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR EDUCATOR

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http://www.aish.com/jl/h/cc/48936837.html

History Crash Course #18: David: The King

by Rabbi Ken Spiro

David established Jerusalem as Israel's capital over 3,000 years ago.

King David is one of the most important figures in Jewish history. Born in 907 BCE, he reigns as king of Israel for 40 years, dying at age 70 in 837 BCE. There is so much that can be said about him. Some people like to focus on the warrior aspect — the chivalrous warrior fighting for God — but when his persona and accomplishments are considered as a whole, it is his spiritual greatness that shines most of all. David's first and foremost drive is to have a relationship with God. We get the glimpse of the beauty of his soul when we read the Psalms, most of which he wrote. Who doesn't know:

The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want ... (Psalm 23)
The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom should I fear ... (Psalm 27)
I lift my eyes to the mountains — from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, Maker of heaven and earth ... (Psalm 121)

Even when we consider his military conquest, we see that the driving force behind them was his attachment to God. The hereditary bloodline of King David will become the only legitimate royal bloodline in Jewish history. From David will come all the future kings of Judah and ultimately, at the end of history, the Messiah. This idea of a God-ordained monarchy will be copied by many other nations throughout history and will serve as the basis for the concept of "the divine right of kings" in Medieval and Renaissance Europe.(1)

The Conquest Of Jerusalem

We know historically that the story of Israel during this entire period of time — from the Exodus onward — is the story of a tiny nation sandwiched between the two great ancient civilizations, Egypt and Mesopotamia (which was ruled at various times by the Assyrians, Babylonians or Persians). When David takes the throne, Egypt and Assyria are both on a significant decline. They're not in any position to expand, which leaves a vacuum in the middle where Israel is located, and Israel is allowed to expand unmolested by these other great empires. Thus David is able to subdue, at long last, the Philistine threat and to conquer the remaining Canaanite city-state — Jerusalem — that the Israelites have thus far not been able to conquer. (For the 440 years since the Jewish people first entered the Land of Israel until the time of King David, Jerusalem has remained an unconquered non-Jewish city in the heart of a Jewish country. It is a city-state inhabited by Canaanite tribe called Jebusites (the Arab village of Silwan, just south of the walls of the Old City, is located there now). It is heavily fortified, yet despite its seemingly impregnable appearance, Jerusalem has one weakness — its only source of water is a spring outside the city walls. The spring is accessed from inside the city by a long shaft carved into rock. The Book of Samuel and the Book of Chronicles describe how David's general, Yoab, climbs up a *tzinor* (literally "pipe") enters the city and conquers it. Some archaeologists speculate that this might refer to the city's ancient water system — whose source was the Gihon Spring — which is a tourist attraction in "David's City," outside the walls of today's Jerusalem.

Why Jerusalem?

The first thing that David does after he occupies the city is make it his capital. And here we have to pause and ask: Why Jerusalem? Certainly there were more suitable sites for the capital of Israel. Jerusalem does not adjoin any important body of water nor is it located on any trade route. All the capital cities in the world are built near oceans, seas, rivers, lakes, or at least near a major trade route. (There are major trade routes crisscrossing Israel at this time. There is the Kings Highway, which is one of the major trade routes in the ancient Middle East, running from the Gulf of Aqaba on the Red Sea to Damascus. And there is also the Via Maris, "Way of the Sea," which runs from Egypt along the Mediterranean coast then through Israel and on to Syria.) Logically, the capital of Israel should have been on the Mediterranean Sea. Ideally a place like Jaffa (next to today's Tel Aviv) would have made the most sense. So

why Jerusalem? The reason why Jerusalem has to do with a very unique aspect of the Jewish people, and why the children of Israel became a nation in the first place. Normally, nations become nations by living in a piece of real estate for a long period of time, developing a common language and a common culture. Take the French for example. They didn't all wake up one day and decide they liked wine, cheese and croissants. A group of people over a period of time moved into a common piece of real estate (which later became known as France), and shared a common language. After a shared period of national experience, they coalesced into an identity known as the French. More or less, this scenario works for every nation. The Jews became a nation shortly after escaping slavery in Egypt. They were not yet in the land of Israel, they were camping out in no man's land, in the desert, at the foot of Mount Sinai. The Jews became a nation there, when they made a covenant with God, promising "we will do and we will hear." The nationhood of Israel is defined, first and foremost, by its communal relationship with God and by the Jewish people's historic mission. And it turns out that there is no better place to relate to God than Jerusalem.

God's Place

After David makes Jerusalem his capital, he buys the upper part of the hill above the northern boundary of the city from its owner Aravnah, the Jebusite. The purchase is recorded in the Bible in two places (2 Samuel 24:24 and 1 Chronicles 21:25). This hill is Mount Moriah and what it may lack in physical size, it more than compensates for spiritual greatness.(2) From the earliest period of Jewish history, the Patriarchs of the Jewish people recognized the tremendous spiritual power of Mount Moriah. This is where Abraham, sensing God's presence, went up to offer Isaac as a sacrifice and later remarked as the Bible records:

"The Lord will see," as it is said to this day, "On the Lord's mountain, He will be seen." (Genesis 22:14)
This is where Jacob dreamt of a ladder going to heaven, and said:
"How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." (Genesis 28:17)

No wonder this is a spot that every major conqueror in all of human history has wanted to own. (Jerusalem has been conquered or destroyed 36 times in 3,000 years.) Today on this spot stands an Islamic structure known as the Dome of the Rock. Under this golden dome is an exposed piece of the bedrock of Mount Moriah-metaphysically known as the even *shatiya*, literally, "drinking stone." Water and spirituality are synonymous, and the Torah is known as *mayim chayim*, "water of life." According to Judaism, the world is spiritually nourished from this spot, this stone-which is the metaphysical center of the universe. This is the place where God's presence can be felt more intensively than in any other place on the planet earth. Therefore, this is the logical place to build a permanent resting spot for the most holy object that the Jewish people have — the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant.

The Site of the Temple

King David wastes no time bringing the Ark to Jerusalem. And it is an occasion of great communal happiness. In ecstasy David dances wildly at this celebration. For this he is condemned by his wife Michal, the daughter of Saul, who had stuck with him through thick and thin and who even saved his life when King Saul wanted to kill him. But now Michal attacks David, ridiculing his behavior (2 Samuel 6:16-23): *"How glorious was the king of Israel today, who was exposed today in the eyes of the maidservants of his servants, as one of the boors would be exposed!"* David — who had thought nothing of his own honor in his gladness that he had made a special connection with God, — responds in astonishment: *"Before the Lord I will make merry. And I shall behave even more humbly than this, and I shall be lowly in my eyes; and of the maidservants of whom you have spoken, by them shall I will be held in honor."* The story concludes with the punishment visited on Michal for her harsh condemnation of the man chosen by God to be Israel's king: *And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.* Although David brings up the Ark of the Covenant to Mount Moriah, he is not allowed by God to build the Temple. A number of reasons are given. One is that the Temple is a house of God and a house of peace and David has a lot of blood on his hands from subduing the enemies of Israel. However, he is promised that his son will build it. Now David has a number of sons by several wives, some of whom give him serious trouble. One, Amnon, rapes his sister, Tamar. Another, Absalom plots against David and tries to have him deposed. But there is one special boy, Solomon, born from David's relationship with the beautiful Bathsheba.

David and Bathsheba

The story of David's relationship with Bathsheba (II Samuel Chap. 11) is one of the most misread stories in the Bible, and we have to be careful in reading it as if it were some kind of soap opera. In summary, however, this is what happens. Restless one night, David is pacing the roof of his palace from where he has a view of the homes and gardens in the city below(3). And there he spies a

beautiful woman bathing. She is the wife of one of his generals, Uriah, the Hittite, who is away at war. David sends for Bathsheba and spends the night with her. When she becomes pregnant, he commands that Uriah be placed on the front lines, where he dies in battle. David then marries Bathsheba. At this point, the prophet Nathan is sent by God to reprove David. (See 2 Samuel 12.) He says that he has come to inform the king of a great injustice in the land. A rich man with many sheep, stole the one beloved sheep of a poor man, and had it slaughtered for a feast. Furious at what he hears, King David, declares, "As God lives, the one who has done this deserves death." Responds the prophet, "You are that man!" David is humbled. "I have sinned before God," he says. This is an enormously complex story and there is much more here than meets the eye. Technically, Bathsheba was not a married woman since David's troops always gave their wives conditional divorces, lest a soldier be missing in action leaving his wife unable to remarry.(4) However, the Bible states clearly that David acted improperly, and the Sages explain that while David did not commit adultery in the literal sense, he violated the spirit of the law(5). As noted in earlier installments, the Bible takes a hyper-critical position of Jewish leaders. It never whitewashes anyone's past, and in that it stands alone among the records of ancient peoples which usually describe kings as descendants of gods without faults. David's greatness shines in both his ability to take responsibility for his actions and the humility of his admission and the repentance that follows. This is part of the reason that the ultimate redeemer of the Jewish people and the world will descend from David's line — he will be "Messiah son of David." Shortly thereafter, Bathsheba gives birth, but the child becomes deathly ill as the prophet Nathan had predicted. David goes into a period of prayer and fasting, but the child dies nevertheless. David realizes that the death of the baby and later the revolt of his beloved son, Absalom (II Samuel 15-19), were divine punishment and also served as atonement for his actions. David "pays his dues," repents for many years and is ultimately forgiven by God. Before long Bathsheba is pregnant again. And this time, she bears a healthy child — who is named Solomon, and who will be the golden child, gifted with unusual wisdom.

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1) Many peoples around the world have taken this idea one step further and actually claim that their royal family and even they, themselves, are actual descendants of the ancient Hebrews. One fascinating example are the Makuya sect in Japan who claim that there is an ancient connection between the Japanese and the Jews and that the Royal family of Japan is actually descended from King David.
Another example is the British. For seven hundred years, every king and queen of England was crowned king while sitting on a throne mounted on a large block of limestone. The stone is called the "Stone of Scone King Edward I (1239-1307) stole the stone from the Scots (It was returned to Scotland in 1997). Scottish tradition held that the stone was the "pillow" that Jacob rested his head on when he had his dream. It was used as a coronation stone by the early Hebrew kings and was kept in Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem After the destruction of the First Temple in 422 BCE, the stone eventually found its way first to Ireland and later to Scotland, . As outrageous as this idea may sound it shows us the centrality and importance of the Davidic line in history.
2) It is often mentioned that the Western Wall is the holiest spot in the world for the Jews. This is simply not true. The Western Wall is merely a retaining wall built around Mt Moriah by Herod the Great more than 2,000 years ago. The holiest spot is Mt Moriah itself. Today this holiest of places is hidden behind the Western Wall and under the Moslem shrine called the Dome of the Rock. 3) For more details see Talmud, Sanhedrin 107a
4) Talmud, Shabbat 56b
5) See Talmud, Sanhedrin 107b. As a prophet, David saw that Bathsheba was destined for him. (Solomon's birth and kingship are proof of this point). The issue was not that Bathsheba was meant to be his wife, but rather how he acquired her.

This article can also be read at: http://www.aish.com/jl/h/cc/48936837.html

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR EDUCATOR

The Book of Psalms: Traditional & modern views of the Book of Psalms, and the role of Psalms in Jewish liturgy

Rabbi Louis Jacobs

From MyJewishLearning.com, excerpted with permission from The Jewish Religion: A Companion, *Oxford University Press*

Some Very Ancient Liturgy

The Book of Psalms, Hebrew *Tehillim, (*"Praises"), is the first book of the third section of the Bible, the *Ketuvim* or Sacred Writings, and comprises 150 psalms. Many of the psalms have superscriptions, describing their contents, their author, and, it is generally assumed, in some cases, the melodies to which they were sung in the Temple. In the Jewish tradition, but not in the King James Version, these superscriptions are counted as separate verses. (The New English Bible translation omits the superscriptions altogether: an extremely odd procedure, since, even if the superscriptions are later additions, they became part of the book at a very early period, and one would have thought that the aim of any translation should be to convey the book as it has come down though the ages.) Many of the psalms are obviously liturgical compositions. The Levites [in the Temple] sang a psalm for each day of the week and on the Sabbaths and festivals, accompanying the song with instrumental music.

Are They All King David's?

It has long been noted that the first Psalm appears to be an introduction to the book as a whole, as Psalm 150 appears to be an epilogue. There is a concluding note at the end of Psalms 41, 72, 89, and106, which suggests that the book is in five separate sections. The rabbinic midrash [rabbinic interpretation from the period of the rabbis of the Mishnah and the Talmud] to Psalms states that David composed his Psalms in five books, just as Moses wrote the five books of the Pentateuch. In this Midrash, and very frequently in the Rabbinic literature, David is assumed to be the author of the book of Psalms. But in the famous Talmudic passage *(Bava Batra* 14b) on the authorship of the biblical books, it is said that David included in his book psalms written by some who preceded him. The superscription to Psalm 90, for instance, is: "A prayer of Moses, the man of God." In fact, while seventy-two of the psalms are attributed to David, this one is attributed to Moses, and some to other authors. Some of the psalms are attributed to no particular author and are known, in the tradition, as 'orphan psalms'. Itis incorrect, therefore, to say that in the traditional view David is the author of all the psalms in the book. Nevertheless, the tradition still sees David as the final author of the book, although he is said to have included the works of others in his final composition. In 2 Samuel 23:1 **David** is described as 'the sweet singer in Israel'.

An Anthology With Davidic (or Older) Roots

This view of Davidic authorship was not left unquestioned in the Middle Ages and is rejected by all modern biblical scholars as anachronistic. Psalm 137, for instance, speaks of the period, hundreds of years after David's death, when the Temple had been destroyed and the Jews were in exile in Babylon. The book of Psalms is now seen rather as a collection or anthology of psalms compiled at different periods, though there is no real reason to deny that some of them may go back to David himself, with psalms or groups of psalms added later to the collection. There is no agreement on the dating of the various psalms. The older view that the whole book dates from as late as the period of the Maccabees is now rejected by the majority of scholars, some holding, on the analogy of ancient Near Eastern texts unearthed fairly recently, that psalm-making, even with the employment of the same terms and language-patterns, was a feature of the surrounding culture long before Israel came on to the scene. Needless to say, the question of dating and authorship is totally irrelevant to the value of the book of Psalms as religious outpourings of the highest order, recognized as such by the millions of worshippers, Jews, Christians, and others, who have used the Psalms to express the deepest emotions of their own religious heart.

Special Psalms for Special Days

It is interesting that in the Talmudic period no Psalms were recited as part of the service except for the Hallel psalms (a special grouping of psalms of praise) on the festival[s]. As the post-Talmudic liturgy developed, a large number of further psalms were incorporated into the Prayer Book, not all at once but gradually over the centuries. To the daily morning service were added: Psalms 100, 145 and 150. To the Sabbath and festival services were added Psalms 19, 34, 90, 91, 135, 136, 33, 92,93 in this order, since on these days people, not having to go out to work, did not have to hurry from the synagogue. At the end of the morning service, a special psalm for each day is recited, prefaced with the words:"This is the first [second, third, and so on] day of the week, on which the Levites in the Temple used to say . . ." Psalm 24 is recited when the *Sefer Torah* is returned to the Ark after the reading on weekdays, and Psalm 29 on the Sabbath. The penitential Psalm 27 is recited at the end of the morning and evening service during the penitential season from the beginning of the month of Elul until Hoshanah Rabbah [the final day of Sukkot]. Before the evening service at the termination of the Sabbath Psalms 144 and 67 are read. Psalm 104 is read during the morning service on Rosh Hodesh, the New Moon, and during the afternoon service on winter Sabbaths. As part of their ritual for welcoming the Sabbath, the Safed Kabbalists [mystics who lived and wrote in Safed in the Land of Israel) in the sixteenth century introduced the recital of Psalms 95-99 and 29, corresponding to the six days of creation, on the eve of the Sabbath, and this is now the universal custom at the Friday night service. Verses from Psalms are scattered through other parts of the Prayer Book.

A Storehouse for Individual Use

In addition to their recital as part of the standard service, the Psalms have been recited by individuals whenever the mood took them. Some pious Jews would recite the whole book of Psalms each week, some even each day. "Saying Psalms" (*Zoggen Tillim,* in Yiddish), as it is called, is often practiced as a prayer for a sick person or when other calamities threaten. In some communities there is a custom to recite on a Yahrzeit [the anniversary of a relative's death] verses of the eightfold alphabetical acrostic, Psalm 119, the initial letters of which are those of the letters of the name of the deceased. There are various chants in which the Psalms are recited, and the Hebrew Bible even has notes for cantillation [traditional chanting] of the Psalms but the musical system these represent is no longer known. The Lithuanian tradition has a particularly yearning and plaintive melody for "saying Psalms."

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http://www.myjewishlearning.com/texts/Bible/Writings/Poetic_Writings/Book_of_Psalms.shtml