

THE TITLE SUPERSCRPTIONS OF THE PSALMS

Most of the psalms have "superscriptions," i.e., those little notes at the top of the psalm that deal with historical situation, tune, authorship, etc. These are not "Holy Spirit-inspired" Scripture, but are akin to the chapter headings we have in our study Bibles which are supplied by editors. Nevertheless, these are historically ancient Jewish witnesses to the Jews' understanding of the origin of the individual psalms. Many recent scholars have discounted the reliability of these superscriptions, but many conservative Bible scholars still do regard them as authentic. Especially note the section below that demonstrates the respect that Jesus and the Apostles had for the authenticity of the superscriptions!

BIBLE KNOWLEDGE COMMENTARY: *Commentators have long debated the translation of the lamed preposition which has been traditionally been taken to designate the authorship of the Psalms.... The preposition can be translated "to," "for," or "of," or a number of other ways. Its use to distinguish authorship has been well-attested Though a translator could interpret the preposition otherwise, sufficient evidence supports its usage in designating authorship. However, each Psalm must be taken individually.... It must also be remembered that Christ and His apostles considered them as witnesses to the individual psalms' authorship.*

JESUS AND THE APOSTLES ACCEPT THE PSALMS' SUPERSCRPTIONS:

Matthew 22:41-43 Jesus asked them, ⁴² "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" "The son of David," they replied. ⁴³ He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'?—Here Jesus attributes **Psalm 110** to Davidic authorship, as noted in the OT superscription. Cf. **Acts 2:24** where Peter says the same thing.

- **Acts 1:15-16, 20** *In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) ¹⁶ and said, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus-- ²⁰ "For," said Peter, "it is written in the book of Psalms, "May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it," and, "May another take his place of leadership. — Peter here quotes from **Psalm 69:25, and 109:8**; both attributed to Davidic authorship, as noted in the OT superscription.*
- **Acts 2:25-28** *David said about him: "I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. ²⁶ Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, ²⁷ because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. ²⁸ You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence."— Peter here quotes from **Psalm 16:8-11** which is attributed to Davidic authorship, as noted in the OT superscription.*
- **Acts 4:25-26** *You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ²⁶ The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One."—Here the believers attribute **Psalm 2 (verses 1-2)** to David. **The OT does not have a superscription.***
- **Romans 4:6-8** *David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: ⁷ "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. ⁸ Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him."— Paul here attributes **Psalm 32 (verses 1-2)** to Davidic authorship, as noted in the OT superscription.*
- **Romans 11:9-10** *And David says: "May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them. ¹⁰ May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever."— Paul here attributes **Psalm 69 (verses 22-23)** to Davidic authorship, as noted in the OT superscription.*
- **Hebrews 4:7** *Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."—The author of Hebrews here attributes **Psalm 95 (verses 7-8)** to David. **The OT does not have a superscription.***

SUPERSCRPTION STATISTICS

- 90 of the psalms have named-author superscriptions.
 - **73 of the psalms are attributed to David.**
 - 12 of the psalms come from Asaph (Psalms 50, 73-83).
 - 1 from Heman the Ezrahite (Psalm 88)
 - 1 from Ethan the Ezrahite (Psalm 89)
 - 2 from Solomon (Psalms 72, 127)
 - 1 from Moses (Psalm 90)
- An additional 11 are attributed to the sons of Korah
- Some of the psalms have non-authorial superscriptions, e.g., **Psalms 120-134-- A song of ascents.**

- Only 34 psalms lack superscriptions of any kind (called "orphan" psalms).¹

Timothy G. Walton
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¹ *NIV-1984 Study Bible.*