

Psalms According to Literary Types

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Notes mostly copied or condensed from *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary*, which, in turn, relied heavily on Hermann Gunkel's pioneering work in the development of form criticism.

Hymns: 8; 19:1-6; 33; 65; 100; 103-105; 111; 113; 114; 115; 117; 134-136; 145-150

Hymns consist of 3 elements: (a) a call to praise, (b) a statement of the motive or reason for praise, and (c) a renewed summons to praise. God-centered.

Hymns of Zion: 46; 48; 76; 87

In them, the worship of the congregation seems to be directed, not to God, but to the temple on Mt. Zion. But this is because the temple is the "dwelling place" of the Lord. They are praises of the presence of the God of Zion.

Enthronement Psalms: 29; 47; 93; 95-99

In connection with the New Year Festival. Praise for God's sovereignty over the world, and His triumph over chaos, His majesty in holiness and power.

Lament Psalms:

The largest group in the Psalter; constructed in 4 sections: (a) a brief invocation to God, often no more than the divine name, (b) a cry for hearing and help, (c) a statement of the nature and causes of the misfortune, and (d) a prayer for deliverance. Swings of poetry from despair to confidence, from personal misery to the greatness of God. Underlying motive is not the disaster itself but the alienation from God it produces. The prayer for deliverance often includes a vow or pledge for an offering or act of service. Laments were sung both by individuals during personal crises and by the community in times of national disaster.

Individual Laments: 3-7; 13; 17; 22; 25; 26; 28; 31; 35; 38; 39; 42-43; 51; 54-57; 59; 61; 63; 64; 69-71; 86; 88; 102; 109; 120; 130; 140-143

The psalmist and associates seem always to be "poor," "needy," "afflicted," "meek," and "righteous," and their enemies are "wicked," "proud," "arrogant," and "liars." These two sets of terms should not be taken too literally. They are conventional designations for two groups opposed in spirit and often in fact—those who were loyal to the covenant, obeyed its laws, and honored God, and those who rejected covenant law and held the power of God in contempt.

Community Laments: 12; 44; 58; 60; 74; 79; 80; 83; 90; 106; 123; 126; 137

The whole community seeks the sanctuary of the temple and the protection of God. Expressions of national sorrow were called forth by a sense of the nation's sin and of the degradation and decay of the covenant community, by crop failure, threat of military attack, or the mockery of victorious enemies.

Songs of Confidence, Trust: 11; 16; 23; 62; 125; 129; 131

The deepest anguish is lighted by faint rays of confidence. So the mood changes from lamentation to thanksgiving. This group of psalms is a study of the qualities of the divine nature on which we may anchor our hope.

Thanksgiving Psalms:

These poems look back on distress and sorrow from the calm and security of deliverance. The period of alienation is still remembered, but its bitterness has been removed by the restoration of communion with God. The 4-fold structure is a complete act of worship, beginning and ending with praise: (a) an introductory passage blesses God for his saving power. (b) This is followed by a poetic narrative patterned closely on the lament form. Describes the deep distress and the cry to God for help. (c) A specific acknowledgement that the source of the psalmists' and joy is the saving love of God, (d) It concludes with thanksgiving and praise.

Individual Thanksgiving Psalms: 30; 32; 34; 41; 66; 92; 116; 138

Community Thanksgiving Psalms: 65; 67; (both connected with agricultural feasts) and 124 (for victory in war)

Royal Psalms: 2; 18; 20; 21; 45; 72; 89; 101; 110; 132; 144

The king's palace and the temple stood side by side, which suggests an intimate relationship between the Davidic monarchy and the God of Israel. Through the king's person, divine blessing was channeled to the nation, and what happened to him happened to all his subjects. His 2 principal functions are reflections of attributes of God: (a) maintaining the covenant law, the revelation of God's will and justice, and (b) defending Israel against her enemies. The monarch's status was conferred on him when the sacred oil of anointing was poured on his head during his coronation. The enthronement of the king was seen in close conjunction with the enthronement of the Lord. Every new year was an anniversary of the king's coronation, and appropriate ritual marked this fact. Psalms 2, 21, 72, 101, 110, and 132 have their setting in the coronation ceremony. Psalm 101 gives the king's response to prayers made on his behalf. Psalms 20 and 144 are prayers for victory; Psalm 18 is thanksgiving for victory. The royal marriage is celebrated in Psalm 45, the most secular of the psalms.

Wisdom Psalms: 1; 37; 49; 73; 112; 127; 128; 133

The priests were teachers of religious traditions of which they were custodians and guardians. Festivals provided the priests with opportunities for teaching. Many of these psalms contain instructional passages. The principal aim of the wisdom psalms is to teach the doctrine that faithful obedience to the revealed will of God brings material and spiritual prosperity, but rejection of his will brings destruction, even if long delayed.

Liturgies/Misc: 15; 24; 50; 75; 85; 118; 121

These psalms display abrupt changes of thought that they appear to be composed of disconnected fragments. In certain psalms, it is possible to detect changes of speakers. This can be explained on the assumption that the psalms of this group were the spoken parts of now unknown rituals. Psalms 15 and 24 are entrance liturgies used at the gates of the temple.

Psalms 50, 75, and 85 seem to belong to the New Year festival and to express God's judgment on the nation, Israel's penitence, and God's final judgment on world history. Psalm 121 is often considered a pilgrim psalm, but it is more likely for the dismissal of pilgrims leaving the temple on their journey home. Psalm 118, which gives thanks for victory in war, is closely related to community thanksgiving psalms.

Pilgrim Psalms: 84; 122

The pilgrims who gathered for the great annual festivals came singing. Most of their hymns are included in other psalm categories, but psalms 84 and 122 belong so distinctively to the pilgrims, that they form a separate group. Psalm 84 expresses the pilgrim's delight at his safe arrival, and gratitude to God for his protection; Psalm 122 is a song for departing pilgrims, radiant with their love for Zion, God's dwelling place.

Psalms of Mixed Type: 9-10; 14; 27; 36; 40; 77; 94; 107

Poems in this category seem to consist of 2 or more psalms of different literary type loosely joined together.

Unclassified because of free composition: 19:7-14; 52; 68; 78; 81; 82; 91; 108; 119; 139