

The Psalms: Structure, Content & Message
Sunday Morning Bible Study
Chapter 4 – The Individual Psalm of Narrative Praise (IP)

INTRODUCTION

- Individual Psalm of Narrative Praise (IP)
- Found throughout Scripture
- Corresponds to the Individual Psalm of Lament (IL). At the end of IL the psalmist vows to praise God. Here, in the IP psalm, we find the fulfillment of that vow.
- IP Psalms: 9; 18; 30; 31:7-8, 19-24; 32; 40:1-12; 66:13-20; 92; (107); 116; (118); 138
- IP outside of the Psalms: Jonah 2, Lamentations 3:25-58, Job 33:26-28
- IP in the New Testament: Luke 1:46-55; 2:29-32; Acts 2:24

THE LITURGICAL ACTION

- The Hebrew designation of the genre is *tôdāh*, a word meaning both “praise” and at the same time “sacrifice of praise” (72).
- We can conclude that *originally* this type of psalm was a statement which accompanied a sacrifice of praise. See Psalm 66:13-15
- What follows is narrative praise, i.e. an account of the wonderful deliverance from trouble which the worshiper had experienced.
- The oral narration of the deliverance, which together with the sacrifice was part of the fulfillment of a vow, presupposes the presence of a circle of listeners who are often mentioned in the Psalms. See Psalm 34:3
- Gradually, the connection of this psalm of narrative or confessing praise with a sacrifice of praise was loosened; it detached itself and became independent. See Psalm 34, 92

THE STRUCTURE

- The IP psalm is related to the IL psalm by means of the vow to praise which the latter brings at its conclusion. In fact, the conclusion of many IL psalms is identical with the introduction of many IP psalms (74).
 - The vow to praise at the end of the IL becomes the announcement at the beginning of the IP.
 - Compare Ps. 13:6 or 56:13 with Psalm 30:1
- Most frequent introduction to IP psalm is like Ps. 34:1, followed by introductory summary of the narrative (Ps. 116:1).
- The main part is then the account which confesses God’s deed, almost always divided into a review of the crisis and an account of the rescue (74).
- Here trouble is often described as being enslaved or being in death, while rescue is correspondingly described as liberation from death (74).

Comparison of IL and IP

IL

call (with complaint)
petition for God's turning toward
petition for God's intervention

IP

"To you I cried."
"You heard me."
"You have drawn me up out of the pit."

- Lastly, there is the conclusion, which always aims at praising God (Ps. 40:3).
- "We observed that the most important feature in the IL psalms is the change to trust, quietness, certainty, or praise. This is precisely what is reflected in the IP psalms. They are all dominated not only by the fact that God reversed suffering in the life of the individual who spoke them, but also by the surprising, overwhelming miracle of this reversal" (75). See Psalm 30:5
- Often the vow to praise returns again at the conclusion, stating that the praise of God will not cease as soon as this confession has been completed. See Ps. 30:12; 92:15; 118:17; Isa. 38:18-19
- At the end narrative praise usually changes into descriptive praise. See Ps. 18:30-31; 40:5; 116:15; 118:5-8; Jonah 2:9

"Narrative praise, as a response to God's deed by a person who has been liberated, heard, healed, and delivered, is something which has occurred everywhere where people live their lives in the presence of a personal god" (76).

"These points can show that the individual psalm of narrative praise (as well as that of the community) has a very special significance and stands peculiarly at the center of the entire psalm material. These psalms are the immediate echoes of God's acts which have been experienced by the community or by an individual member of God's people" (76-77).

AN EXAMPLE OF IP: PSALM 30

- Verse 1a
 - The announcement: "I will extol you, O LORD..."
 - God is to be exalted by the psalm, extolled by it.
 - "God becomes great when the deed which he performed in someone's daily life is joyfully confessed in the presence of others by the person who can bear witness to it" (77).
- Verses 1b-3
 - Does not consist of the more usual single sentence. Instead, the psalmist felt compelled to relate *everything* that had happened.
 - Verse 2 puts the two events together: the *cry* and the *answer*
 - Verse 3 identifies God's deed as "rescue from death"

- “A person can, despite the fact that he or she is still physically living and breathing, nevertheless suffer such pain, anxiety, despair, or lethargy that this condition can no longer really be called life. In this the psalmist saw death at work—the person who suffers thus is in the clutches of death. Therefore anyone who is liberated from such is really rescued from death” (78).
- Verses 4-5
 - Here we find a call to the surrounding listeners to join in praising God
 - What happened to one person here represents a victory with much wider significance. Others likely have experienced or will experience the same series of events: crisis and deliverance.
 - “Hence one individual’s small destiny becomes universally important and meaningful because that individual becomes a witness to a power of life to which others can cling if death should clutch at them” (78).
- Verses 6-10
 - These verses bring a review of the crisis.
 - His supplication is recorded in detail, underscoring for us the close connection of the IP to the IL psalm.
 - Verse 10: two parts of the petition
 - Verse 9: the reasons which should persuade God to hearken to the petition
- Verses 11-12
 - The account of the rescue can now be very brief, because almost everything it wishes to say has already been said.
 - Verse 12 is the expanded vow to praise. The vow is to praise God continually.
 - “It is not as if the psalmist had completed a “thank you” to God, as we might express it; the confessing praise streams out into the expanse of time, into the expanse of existence which henceforth is to be marked by praise” (79).
 - The conclusion of the psalm of narrative praise clearly points in the direction of descriptive praise.
 - “God can be praised in a comprehensive, general way which sees the manifold activity of God in all places—in the total fullness of God’s being and activity” (80).

CONCLUSION

“The statements indicate that a living connection exists between the narrative praise of the individual who experienced salvation and the broad stream of the praise of God, which is not called forth by any special occasion. This praise is sounded forth, first and foremost, in worship. It is something which in all religions constitutes an essential part of the liturgy—*doxology* in its manifold forms. It is accompanied by sacred music; without it worship and sacred rites are unthinkable” (80).

“It is important to note that one source of this broad stream of doxology, of praise of God, and indeed perhaps *the* source, is confessing praise, which arises directly from the experience of a deed of God in the life of a person or of a community” (80).