

Understanding and Praying the Psalms

MAJOR GENRES OF PSALMS

What is a “genre”?

1. A type or class:
 - a. A category of artistic composition, as in music or literature, marked by a distinctive style, form, or content.

Major Genres of Literature: Prose and Poetry.

Major Genres of Prose: Fiction and Non-Fiction.

Genres of Poetry: Epic, Ballad, Sonnet, Lyrical, Pastoral, etc.

So, are there different kinds or classes of Psalm?

- ▶ YES! Individual psalms vary in style, tone, theme, pattern, etc.
- ▶ Groups of psalms seem to share similar characteristics, thus belonging to a common “genre” or type/class of psalm.
- ▶ Last week, we looked at
 - ▶ Psalms of Remembrance (History),
 - ▶ Battle Songs,
 - ▶ Psalms of Repentance/Forgiveness,
 - ▶ Psalms of Entreaty (Asking for Help), etc.

Psalms can be classified into several different categories:

Dennis Bratcher (Christian Resource Institute):

1. **Lament**
2. **Penitential** (*repentance/forgiveness*)
3. **Imprecatory** (*smite my enemies*)
4. **Todah / Thanksgiving**
5. **Salvation History [Remembrance]**
6. **Songs of Trust [Confidence]**
7. **Hymn**
8. **Doxology** (*praise*)
9. **Wisdom**
10. **Torah** (*law*)

Major Genres of Psalms

Tremper Longman identifies 7 major genres:

1. Hymn
2. Lament
3. Thanksgiving Psalms
4. Psalms of Confidence
5. Psalms of Remembrance
6. Wisdom Psalms
7. Kingship Psalms

So, What's the Point?

- ▶ Different psalms were written in different circumstances and for different purposes.
- ▶ Understanding the background and purpose of a psalm will help us interpret and apply it correctly.

The Hymn

- ▶ Bless the LORD, O my soul;
And all that is within me, bless His holy name!
Bless the LORD, O my soul,
And forget not all His benefits: -Psalm 103:1-2
- ▶ Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised
In the city of our God,
In His holy mountain.
Beautiful in elevation,
The joy of the whole earth,
Is Mount Zion on the sides of the north,
The city of the great King. -Psalm 48:1-2

Characteristics of Hymns

- ▶ Hymns are written to praise the Lord!
- ▶ They often begin with a Call to Worship
- ▶ They include reasons for praising God:
 - ▶ Who He Is
 - ▶ What He Has Done
- ▶ They often close by calling us again to praise God.

Types of Hymns

- ▶ Creation Hymns: Psalms 8, 19, 104
 - ▶ God is praised for or by His creation.
- ▶ King Hymns (Royal Hymns): Psalms 47,48
 - ▶ God is praised as King
- ▶ Zion Hymns: Psalm 46
 - ▶ Zion is praised as the dwelling place of God.
- ▶ Hymn of Deliverance: Psalm 98
 - ▶ God is praise for His deliverance.

The Lament

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, and am not silent. –Psalm 22:1-2

I say to God my Rock,
"Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I go about mourning,
oppressed by the enemy?"
My bones suffer mortal agony
as my foes taunt me,
saying to me all day long,
"Where is your God?" –Psalm 42:9-10

Elements of a Lament

1. Invocation
2. Plea for Help
3. Complaint
4. Confession of sin **OR**
5. Assertion of Innocence
6. Curse on enemies
7. Confidence in God
8. Hymn



Examples of Lament Elements

▶ **Invocation/Plea:**

Help, LORD , for the godly are no more; the faithful
have vanished from among men –Psalm 12:1

▶ **Complaint:**

For dogs have surrounded Me;
The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me.
They pierced My hands and My feet;
–Psalm 22:16

More Examples of Lament Elements:

► **Imprecation (curse on enemies):**

Arise, O LORD, Confront him, cast him down; Deliver my life from the wicked with Your sword –Psalm 17:13

► **Assertion of Innocence:**

For without cause they have hidden their net for me in a pit, Which they have dug without cause for my life. - Psalm 35:7

► **Confidence/Hymn:**

Let them shout for joy and be glad,
Who favor my righteous cause;
And let them say continually,
"Let the LORD be magnified,
Who has pleasure in the prosperity of His servant."
And my tongue shall speak of Your righteousness
And of Your praise all the day long. –Psalm 35:27-28

Thanksgiving Psalms

- Express gratitude to the Lord for answered prayer.
- A Psalm of Response for an answered lament.
- Beginning may be similar to a hymn opening (call to worship God) or may be a statement of blessing.

The Pattern of Thanksgiving

1. Opening: Call to Worship or Statement of Blessing
2. Restatement of the Lament
3. Account of God's Deliverance
4. A Call to Worship or a Restatement of Thanks



Example of a Thanksgiving Psalm (Psalm 34)

I will bless the LORD at all times;
His praise shall continually be in my mouth . . .
I sought the LORD, and He heard me,
And delivered me from all my fears . . .
This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard him,
And saved him out of all his troubles . . .
Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good;
Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!
Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
But the LORD delivers him out of them all.

Psalms of Confidence

- ▶ Trust in God's goodness and power!
- ▶ The psalmist trusts God despite the presence of enemies and the threat of danger.
- ▶ Submission to and trust in God.



Examples of Psalms of Confidence

The LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not want.

He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.

He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow
of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

-Psalm 23

Quiet Confidence

LORD, my heart is not haughty,
Nor my eyes lofty.
Neither do I concern myself with great matters,
Nor with things too profound for me.
Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul,
Like a weaned child with his mother;
Like a weaned child is my soul within me.
O Israel, hope in the LORD
From this time forth and forever.

-Psalm 131

Psalms of Remembrance

- ▶ Psalms that recall the great redemptive acts of God on behalf of His people.
- ▶ Two most common events: The Exodus and the establishment of the Davidic Kingship.
- ▶ Calls people to remember God's goodness and to be more faithful in response to God's faithfulness.

Example Psalm of Remembrance (Psalm 105)

Oh, give thanks to the LORD!
 Call upon His name;
 Make known His deeds among the peoples!
 Sing to Him, sing psalms to Him;
 Talk of all His wondrous works! . . .

He remembers His covenant forever,
 The word which He commanded, for a thousand
 generations,
 The covenant which He made with Abraham,
 And His oath to Isaac . . .

He sent Moses His servant,
 And Aaron whom He had chosen.
 They performed His signs among them.

For He remembered His holy promise,
 And Abraham His servant.
 He brought out His people with joy,
 His chosen ones with gladness.

Wisdom Psalms

- ▶ Themes related to wisdom, such as are found in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, etc.
- ▶ Contrasting ways of living that bring about contrasting results/consequences

Examples of Wisdom Psalms

Blessed is the man
 Who walks not in the
 counsel of the ungodly,
 Nor stands in the path of
 sinners,
 Nor sits in the seat of the
 scornful . . .

The ungodly are not so,
 But are like the chaff
 which the wind drives
 away. -Psalm 1

Unless the LORD builds the house,
 They labor in vain who build it;
 Unless the LORD guards the city,
 The watchman stays awake in
 vain.

It is vain for you to rise up early,
 To sit up late,
 To eat the bread of sorrows;
 For so He gives His beloved sleep.
 Behold, children are a heritage
 from the LORD,
 The fruit of the womb is a reward.
 - Psalm 127

Kingship Psalms

- ▶ Often included under the genre of hymn, as royal/kingship hymns.
- ▶ Many focus on the human king of Israel.
- ▶ Many focus on God as the divine Warrior-King
- ▶ Many pre-figure Christ as the coming fulfillment of godly kingship.

Psalm 45: A Kingship Psalm

My heart is stirred by a noble theme as I recite my verses for the king; my tongue is the pen of a skillful writer.

You are the most excellent of men and your lips have been anointed with grace, since God has blessed you forever.

Gird your sword upon your side, O mighty one; clothe yourself with splendor and majesty.

In your majesty ride forth victoriously in behalf of truth, humility and righteousness; let your right hand display awesome deeds.

In your majesty ride forth victoriously in behalf of truth, humility and righteousness;

Let your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of the king's enemies; let the nations fall beneath your feet.

Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.

You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.

Review

- ▶ Studying genres of psalms is important because knowing a psalm's purpose will help us interpret it properly. Also, similar psalms may shed light on each other.
- ▶ The major genres of psalms are:
 1. Hymn
 2. Lament
 3. Thanksgiving Psalms
 4. Psalms of Confidence
 5. Psalms of Remembrance
 6. Wisdom Psalms
 7. Kingship Psalms

A Simpler Approach

3 Kinds of Psalms:

1. Psalms of Orientation: Statements of Positive Truth or Praise of God (Hymns, Wisdom Psalms, Kingship Psalms, Confidence, etc.)
2. Psalms of Disorientation: When all seems lost and we cry out to God (Lament)
3. Psalms of Reorientation: God answers our cries and sets us on our feet again, and we again praise Him (Thanksgiving)