

Introduction to the Book of Psalms

The book of Psalms becomes a favourite for believers who experience the difficulties of life. This year we will be pondering the book of Psalms, the heart of the preacher and effective preaching in a hurting world. In this session we will introduce the book of Psalms – what is in it, how it was brought together, how we should interpret it.

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1. How poetry functions

2. Three main Psalm forms:

A. Lament

The author complains to God about his situation and asks God to deliver Him. (There are more than 60 lament psalms, both corporate and individual.) Typical elements are:

- An opening cry or question (eg.Psalm 57:1)
- A description of the situation or enemies (57:3-4, 6)
- A call for God to intervene (57:2)
- Statement of confidence in God (57:7-8)
- A vow to give thanks when delivered (57:9-10)

B. Praise

The author exalts God for his character or greatness. Typical elements are:

- A call to praise (Psalm 149:1)
- Listing of those who should praise (149:2-3)
- Reasons for praising (149:4-9)
- A concluding “Praise the Lord!” (149:9)

C. Thanksgiving

The author gratefully recognizes God for his acts of salvation toward his people.
Typical elements are:

- A call to give thanks (Psalm 116:1-2, 7)
- A description of the former problems or predicament (116:3-4)
- Praise to God for delivering (116:8-11)
- A general statement about God's care for his people (116:5-6)
- A promise to fulfil vows (116:12-14, 17-19)
- A final statement of praise (116:15-16)

Note – some psalms do not fit in one of these forms (eg. Psalm 133). There are more specific ways to group the Psalms – Royal Psalms that celebrate the king (2, 72, 93-100, 110), Psalms that extol God's Word (1, 119), Penitential Psalms that reflect sorrow over sin (32, 51, 130, etc.). Salvation History Psalms that focus on the history of God's dealings with Israel (78, 105, 106, 135, 136). Messianic psalms in some way point forward to the coming "Greater Son" of David (2, 18, 20, 21, 22, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 144).

3. A note on superscriptions and historical context

4. The collection(s) of psalms

- A. There are 5 "books" of Psalms
- B. There is significant evidence of structure in the book
- C. The Psalms do not appear to be random in order
- D. Some see sequence in the entire collection

1. Synonymous Parallelism

A, and again, B . . . a unified idea (Psa.20:1)

2. Antithetical Parallelism

A, but B . . . a contrast (Psa.20:7, 10:16)

3. Synthetic Parallelism

A is related to B in one of these ways:

(1) Statement/Reason (eg. Psa.28:6)

A, because B

(2) Statement/Question or Question/Statement (eg.Psa.6:5; 119:9)

A ?, B

(3) Statement / Refrain (eg. Psa.136)

Refrain is repeated throughout – A, B, A2, B, A3, B, A4, B.

(4) Progression (eg. Isa.40:9, Psa.1:3)

A, extended/developed in B

(5) Specification or Explanation (eg. Psa.18:24; 72:9)

A, specifically B

(6) Statement / Result (eg. Psa.81:12, 104:5)

A, so that B

(7) Comparative (eg. Pro.27:19)

As A, so B

Practice identifying type of parallelism:

^{ESV} **Psalm 82:3**

Give justice to the weak and the fatherless;
maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute.

- ^{ESV} **Psalm 119:163** I hate and abhor falsehood,
but I love your law.
- ^{ESV} **Psalm 104:33** I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God while I have being.
- ^{ESV} **Psalm 18:36** You gave a wide place for my steps under me,
and my feet did not slip.
- ^{ESV} **Psalm 27:1** The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?
- ^{ESV} **Psalm 26:1** Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity,
and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering.
- ^{ESV} **Proverbs 16:32** Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty,
and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.
- ^{ESV} **Proverbs 16:33** The lot is cast into the lap,
but its every decision is from the LORD.
- ^{ESV} **Proverbs 17:1** Better is a dry morsel with quiet
than a house full of feasting with strife.
- ^{ESV} **Proverbs 17:2** A servant who deals wisely will rule over a son who acts shamefully
and will share the inheritance as one of the brothers.

