

“Scripture speaks to us; the Psalms speak for us.”

And, among all the books, the Psalter has certainly a very special grace, a choiceness of quality well worthy to be pondered; for, besides the characteristics which it shares with others, it has this peculiar marvel of its own, that within it are represented and portrayed in all their great variety the movements of the human soul. It is like a picture, in which you see yourself portrayed and, seeing, may understand and consequently form yourself upon the pattern given. Elsewhere in the Bible you read only that the Law commands this or that to be done, you listen to the Prophets to learn about the Saviour’s coming or you turn to the historical books to learn the doings of the kings and holy men; but in the Psalter, besides all these things, you learn. about yourself You find depicted in it all the movements of your soul, all its changes, its ups and downs, its failures and recoveries. Moreover, whatever your particular need or trouble, from this same book you can select a form of words to fit it, so that you do not merely hear and then pass on but learn the way to remedy your ill....

And herein is yet another strange thing about the Psalms. In the other books of Scripture we read or hear the words of holy men as belonging only to those who spoke them, not at all as though they were our own; and in the same way the doings there narrated are to us material for wonder and examples to be followed, but not in any sense things we have done ourselves. With this book, however, though one does read the prophecies about the Saviour in that way, with reverence and with awe, in the case of all the other Psalms it is as though it were one’s own words that one read; and anyone who hears them is moved at heart, as though they voiced for him his deepest thoughts.

St. Athanasius
Letter to Marcellinus
4th Century A.D.

The New Testament quotes psalms more than any other Old Testament book.

We Will not attempt to cover the mechanics of Hebrew poetry (parallelism, meter, etc.)

Types of Psalms

Hymns

*Hymns are easily recognized by their passionate praise of the LORD. Hymns share a basic structure: **1)** Hymns begin with a call to worship; **2)** they share evidence for the reasons God should be praised; and **3)** they conclude with further praise.*

Psalm 103:1-5, 22

Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. ²Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—³who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, ⁴who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, ⁵who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s...Praise the Lord, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the Lord, my soul.

- **General Praises**
8, 29, 33, 65, 95, 100, 103, 104, 113, 114, 117, 134-136, 145-150
- **Celebration of Yahweh as King**
47, 93, 96-99
- **Songs of Zion**
46, 48, 76, 84, 87, 122

Laments

Laments make up almost one third of the Psalter. They are the most common type of psalm. In Laments, the psalmist's expresses his struggle with trouble and affliction often taking the form of a call for God's intervention, complaint, petition, request for vengeance, a statement of innocence or confession of sin, a vow to praise God for deliverance, and trust and confidence in God's faithfulness.

Psalm 54

Save me, God, by Your name,
And vindicate me by Your power.
² Hear my prayer, God;
Listen to the words of my mouth.
³ For strangers have risen against me
And violent men have sought my life;
They have not set God before them. *Selah*
⁴ Behold, God is my helper;
The Lord is the sustainer of my soul.
⁵ He will pay back the evil to my enemies;
Destroy them in Your faithfulness.
⁶ Willingly I will sacrifice to You;
I will praise Your name, Lord, for it is good.
⁷ For He has saved me from all trouble,
And my eye has looked *with satisfaction* upon my enemies.

- **Individual Laments**
3, 5-7, 13, 17, 22, 25-28, 35, 39, 41-43, 51, 54-57, 61, 64, 69, 71, 86, 88, 102, 109, 130, 140-143
- **Communal Laments**
12, 44, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 90, 126, 137

Songs of Thanksgiving

Psalms of Thanksgiving share gratitude and praise God for a specific act of deliverance that the psalmist has experienced. They are essentially the psalmist's response to God answering the prayer of a Lament, as a thank-offering. The Thanksgiving psalm has three elements: 1) Invoking the name of Yahweh; 2) an account of the psalmist's experience; and 3) the conclusion of praising Yahweh.

Psalm 124

"Had it not been the Lord who was on our side," Let Israel say, ²"Had it not been the Lord who was on our side
When people rose up against us, ³Then they would have swallowed us alive, When their anger was kindled
against us; ⁴Then the waters would have flooded over us, The stream would have swept over our souls; ⁵Then
the raging waters would have swept over our souls." ⁶Blessed be the Lord, Who has not given us to be torn by
their teeth. ⁷Our souls have escaped like a bird from the trapper's snare; The snare is broken and we have
escaped. ⁸Our help is in the name of the Lord, Who made heaven and earth.

- **Individual Thanksgivings**
9, 10, 32, 34, 92, 116
- **Communal Thanksgivings**
67, 107, 124

Royal Psalms

Royal psalms are of various types that concern the relationship between God and the king.

Psalm 2 (Considered a Coronation Psalm)

Why are the nations restless And the peoples plotting in vain? ²The kings of the earth take their stand And the rulers conspire together Against the Lord and against His Anointed, *saying*, ³“Let’s tear their shackles apart And throw their ropes away from us!” ⁴He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them. ⁵Then He will speak to them in His anger And terrify them in His fury, *saying*, ⁶“But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain.” ⁷“I will announce the decree of the Lord: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have fathered You. ⁸Ask *it* of Me, and I will certainly give the nations as Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth as Your possession. ⁹You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware.’” ¹⁰Now then, you kings, use insight; Let yourselves be instructed, you judges of the earth. ¹¹Serve the Lord with reverence And rejoice with trembling. ¹²Kiss the Son, that He not be angry and you perish *on* the way, For His wrath may be kindled quickly. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!

- 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132, 144

Psalms of Confidence

Psalms of confidence highlight a firm trust in God and His work.

Psalm 62:1-2, 8, 11-12

My soul *waits in* silence for God alone; From Him *comes* my salvation. He alone is my rock and my salvation, My stronghold; I will not be greatly shaken...Trust in Him at all times, you people; Pour out your hearts before Him; God is a refuge for us...God has spoken once; Twice I have heard this: That power belongs to God; And faithfulness is Yours, Lord, For You reward a person according to his work.

- **Individual Psalms of Confidence**
4, 11, 16, 23, 62, 91, 121, 131
- **Communal Psalms of Confidence**
115, 125, 129

Wisdom Psalms

The Wisdom psalms have similar themes and contrasts the lives of the righteous and the wicked similar to the other wisdom literature in Scripture (Job, Proverbs, Song of Solomon).

Psalm 1

Blessed is the person who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! ²But his delight is in the Law of the Lord, And on His Law he meditates day and night. ³He will be like a tree planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season, And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers. ⁴The wicked are not so, But they are like chaff which the wind blows away. ⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. ⁶For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish.

- 1, 34, 37, 49, 73, 111, 112

Minor Types

There are other groups of psalms that are included in the main genres of psalms, but they also have unique characteristics that distinguish them in special ways.

- **Torah Psalms** praise the value and holiness of the Law.
1, 19, 119
- **Psalms of Ascent** (or “Pilgrim Songs”) are believed to be the songs the worshippers sang as they travelled up to Jerusalem to celebrate the yearly festivals of Unleavened Bread, Weeks, and Tabernacles/Booths (**Psalm 122:4**).
120-134
- **Gate Liturgies** are believed to be songs the worshippers sang as they approached the gate of the Temple.
15, 24

Collections

“Of David”

- 75 Psalms (2-9; 11-32; 34-41; 51-65; 68-70; 86; 95; 101; 103; 108-110; 122; 124; 131; 133; 138-145)
- Many were linked to historical events.

1. **Psalm 3**: A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son
2. **Psalm 7**: A Shiggaion of David, which he sang to the Lord concerning the words of Cush, a Benjaminite.
3. **Psalm 30**: A Psalm of David. A song at the dedication of the temple.
4. **Psalm 34**: Of David, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away.
5. **Psalm 51**: A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.
6. **Psalm 52**: A Maskil/Maschil of David, when Doeg the Edomite, came and told Saul, “David has come to the house of Ahimelech.”
7. **Psalm 54**: A Maskil of David, when the Ziphites went and told Saul, “Is not David hiding among us?”
8. **Psalm 56**: A Miktam of David, when the Philistines seized him in Gath.
9. **Psalm 57**: A Miktam of David, when he fled from Saul, in the cave.
10. **Psalm 59**: A Miktam of David, when Saul sent men to watch his house in order to kill him.
11. **Psalm 60**: A Miktam of David; for instruction; when he strove with Aram-naharaim and with Aram-zobah, and when Joab on his return struck down twelve-thousand of Edom in the Valley of Salt.
12. **Psalm 63**: A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah.
13. **Psalm 142**: A Maskil of David, when he was in the cave. A Prayer.

“Of Asaph”

- 12 Psalms (50, 73-83)
- Asaph was a leading musician and singer in the time of David (1 Chronicles 15:19; 16:4f).

“Of the Sons of Korah”

- 11 Psalms (42-49, 84-85, 87-88)
- The Sons of Korah were the sons of Moses’ cousins Korah. The Kohathites were descended from Korah and were considered an important group of singers (2 Chronicles 20:19).

“Of Solomon”

- 2 Psalms (72, 127)

“(According) to Jeduthun”

- 3 Psalms (39, 62, 77)
- An accomplished temple musician and singer in the time of David and Solomon (1 Chronicles 9:16; 2 Chronicles 5:12; Nehemiah 11:17).

“Of Ethan the Ezrahite”

- 1 Psalm (89)
- Known as a famous sage of Solomon’s time (1 Kings 4:31).

“Of Heman the Ezrahite”

- 1 Psalm (88)
- Another famous sage of Solomon’s time (1 Kings 4:31).

“A Prayer of Moses”

- 1 Psalm (90)
- There is nothing in the poem to link it directly to Moses

Use of the Psalms

- **A Mirror to the Soul**
- **Relationship**
- **Praying the Psalms**
- **Therapeutic Value: Imprecatory Psalms**
- **Worship**
- **Incarnation: Seeing the Psalms**

