

Categories of Psalms

Drawn from various sources including *ESVSB* Introduction and Mark D. Futato, *Interpreting the Psalms: An Exegetical Handbook*, 146-174.

Type	Hymns	Laments	Thanksgiving	Confidence	Divine Kingship	Royal	Wisdom and Torah
Topic	Praising God for his work in creation or redemption, or for his attributes.	Plea for God to act to save from trouble Express disorientation of person/people praying. Communal or individual. 1/3 of psalms	Praise and thank God for his saving action, often in response to a prayer. Communal or individual.	Express trust in God regarding personal trouble that is not yet resolved	Focus on the kingship of God manifest in creation, redemption, and/or judgment	Concern with Davidic king as blessing for people	Affinity with wisdom lit in vocabulary and themes; emphasis on teaching and reflection
Structure	1) opening invitation to praise God 2) explanation of reasons to praise God 3) concluding affirmation of faith or repeated invitation to praise	1) Plea movement (longer section) addresses three questions: a) To Whom the plea is addressed (O LORD,...). b) Why am I experiencing trouble? (complaint or confession). c) What does the psalmist want God to do concretely? (forgiveness, healing, vindication, deliverance, support. 2) Praise movement may include statement of faith or trust, or a vow to offer thanks or sacrifice in temple (e.g., 56:12).	1) Psalmist's intention to praise God (34:1; 75:1) or expression of loving gratitude (116:1; 18:1) 2) Narration of trouble, petition, and deliverance 3) Renewed thanksgiving, or invitation to others	No common structure.	No common structure.		

Type	Hymns	Laments	Thanksgiving	Confidence	Divine Kingship	Royal	Wisdom and Torah
Other traits	Bright, positive mood	Characterized by honesty and intensity of feeling. Move from negative to positive, from plea to praise. On literal level, psalmist's prayer is for <i>this</i> life (e.g., 27:13)		Confident mood. God as "refuge" is dominant image. Lack the anguish that characterizes laments; have not yet experienced the salvation that characterizes psalms of thanksgiving.	Common affirmation: "Lord is king"	prayers (20), thanks (21); messianic	Contrast way of the righteous, way of the wicked; invite decisions that accord with God's teaching (Torah) and urge trust in God
E.g.s	103, 104, 105,	3, 4, 6, 22, 31, 56	9, 30	27	93-99, (also 47, 24, 29)	2, 72, 110	1, 19, 32, 34, 37, 49, 73, 112, 119, 128

No strict division of psalms into categories works; some are mixed types and can be categorized in various ways. Other designations include:

- "Songs of Zion" (137:3) celebrate Jerusalem as the city the Lord has chosen, will save, and exalt (46, 48, 76, 87, 122, [137]).
- Psalms that draw lessons from history are called *historical* (78, 104-107).
- Some that contain oracles are called *prophetic* (81).
- Some laments include curses or imprecations and are sometimes called *cursing* psalms (35, 55, 58, 59, 69, 79, 83, 109, 137).
- Some are grouped on the basis of liturgical usage (sometimes conjectural):
 - *Hallel psalms* sung at Passover and other festivals, 113-118;
 - *Songs of Ascents* for going up to Jerusalem or climbing temple stairs, 120-134; and
 - *entrance hymns*, perhaps sung as the temple's entrance, 15, 24.
- Some are associated with court ceremony are called *enthronement* psalms (2, 110) or **royal wedding** songs (45).
- Tradition identifies seven as *penitential psalms*, emphasizing repentance for sin: 6, 25, 32, 38, 51, 130, 143.
- Psalms of Mercy: 25, 41, 42-43, 51, 57, 92, 103, 119:81-88, 136