

# PSALM GENRES

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The Psalms were written as poems to be sung in corporate worship and (to a lesser degree) for personal or family use. There is a wide variety of psalm types or genres which can be grouped into a few categories. The list below accounts for most major types, but there are subvarieties of these as well as some lesser occurring forms

## PSALMS CELEBRATING THE DIVINE ORDER

<b>HYMNS OF PRAISE</b>	Calls to worship God for His worthiness & goodness	<b>Psalm 150:6</b> "Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD."
<b>SONGS FOR CEREMONIES</b>	Songs used for entering the Temple or special liturgies	<b>Psalm 24:5</b> , "Lift up your heads, O gates, and be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in!"
<b>ROYAL CELEBRATIONS</b>	Songs celebrating God's kingship or His king on earth	<b>Psalm 2:6</b> , "But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain."
<b>SONGS OF ZION</b>	Songs about God's preserving Jerusalem as His dwelling place	<b>Psalm 87:3</b> , "Glorious things of you are spoken, O city of God."

## PSALMS MOURNING SERIOUS DISORDER

<b>SONGS FOR PERSONAL LAMENT</b>	Songs of personal distress that cry out to God for help.	<b>Psalm 22:1</b> , "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?"
<b>SONGS FOR NATIONAL LAMENT</b>	Songs of national distress that cry out to God for help.	<b>Psalm 79:9</b> , "Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Your name; And deliver us and forgive our sins...."
<b>SONGS OF PROPHETIC INDICTMENT</b>	Songs which meditate on a direct word from God addressing ills in the world.	<b>Psalm 14:1</b> , "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; There is no one who does good."

## PSALMS REJOICING IN RESTORED ORDER

<b>SONGS FOR PUBLIC THANKS</b>	Songs to accompany thank offerings for God's deliverance from trouble.	<b>Psalm 40:1</b> , "I waited patiently for the LORD; And He inclined to me and heard my cry."
<b>SONGS OF TRUST</b>	Songs declaring God's trustworthiness and faithfulness.	<b>Psalm 11:1</b> , "In the LORD I take refuge." <b>Psalm 23:1</b> , "The LORD is my shepherd. I shall not want."
<b>SONGS OF NATIONAL REMEMBRANCE</b>	Songs rejoicing in God's covenant faithfulness to His people thru the ages.	<b>Psalm 106:44-45</b> , "He looked upon their distress when He heard their cry; And He remembered His covenant..."
<b>SONGS OF INSTRUCTION</b>	Songs that teach the singers God's wisdom revealed in creation & Torah.	<b>Psalm 19:7</b> , "The Law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul."

There are a few other categories of pss that can fit into these groupings. These have been selected as the most representative. Many pss contain more than one of these genres. For instance, Ps 19 is partly instruction (vv. 1-10) & partly lament (vv. 11-14).

- C. Songs of Praise are known for 3 elements. See Ps 100.
1. Calls for Praise, Ps 100:1-2
  2. **Causes** for Praise, Ps 100:3
  3. Repeated Calls (& Causes) for Praise, Ps 100:4 (5)
    - Other examples: Pss 33, 36, 105, 111, 113, 117, 135, 136, 146, 147

### III. Flexible Forms

- A. Sometimes a psalm will not include all of the form elements commonly associated with such. For instance, not every lament has a vow of thanks.
- B. Many psalms contain elements of more than one genre. In such cases, one genre tends to **dominate** the psalm.

### IV. Other Elements

- A. When people think of psalm types, they might think of some very different categories, such as Messianic pss, penitential pss, or imprecatory pss. These are not psalm types in the literary sense but psalms which have these features to one degree or another
- B. Messianic psalms refer to poems which contain or contribute to some **expectation** of the Messiah.
  1. Any genre of psalm might contain a messianic element.
  2. While some pss prophecy directly about Messiah (Ps 110), most messianic expectations are built more by pattern (Ps 118).
  3. The NT's application of a psalm to Jesus doesn't necessarily prove that the psalm is prophetic. Jesus might be fulfilling the pattern of the ps.
- C. Penitential prayers are mostly found in **laments**, though they can also appear briefly in songs of thanks and praise. Examples: Ps 32; 51
- D. Imprecatory prayers (prayers for **judgment** on the wicked) are mostly found in laments but may also appear in other genres. Examples: Ps 109; Ps 137:5-9; Ps 139:19-22.

## PSALM GENRES



**GOD, MY EXCEEDING JOY**  
A JOYFUL JOURNEY THRU THE PSALMS

December 4, 2022

### I. A Variety of Genres

- A. *Genre* is a French term meaning "kind or sort." In literature, music, & the arts, genres categorize a composition according to form, style, or content.
- B. The chart inside lists most major genres in the Psalms. Sometimes these genre labels go by different names. For instance, what some call a "lament," others will call a "psalm of **complaint**." There are also some other genres which appear less frequently or prominently than these.

### II. Predictable Patterns

- A. Some genres contain somewhat predictable elements within them.
- B. For instance, laments are known for 5 elements. See Psalm 13.
  1. Address to **Deity**, Ps 13:1a
  2. Complaint of Trouble, Ps 13:1b-2
  3. Petition, Ps 13:3-4
  4. Confession of Trust, Ps 13:5a
  5. **Vow** of Thanks, Ps 13:5b-6
- C. Songs of Thanks are known for 4 elements. See Ps 138.
  1. Announcement of Praise, Ps 138:1-2a
  2. General Description of Praiseworthiness, Ps 30:2b
  3. **Report** of Deliverance, Ps 30:3
  4. Extended Praise of God, Ps 30:4-8
  - Other examples: Pss 18, 30, 32, 34, 40, 106, 116, 138