

LIVING FAITH CHAPEL

How To Read the Psalms: Genre

What is a genre?

Genre refers to a group of texts similar in their mood, content, structure or phraseology.

Why bother with genre?

It determines the reading strategy of a particular text.

Genre of the Psalms

- The general genre: poetry
- The specific genres within: hymn, lament, thanksgiving psalm, the psalm of confidence, the psalm of remembrance, the wisdom psalm, and the kingship psalm

The Hymn

Basic structure:

1. Hymns begin with a call to worship
2. They continue by expanding on the reasons why God should be praised.
3. Hymns often include, and sometimes conclude with, further calls to praise.

The Reasons for praise, however, form the most significant part of the psalm.

- He is praised for being the Creator (cf. Ps. 19:1-4)
- He is also praised as King (cf. Ps.47:5-6)
- The single most important reason for praise given by the psalmist is certainly that the Lord has delivered Israel out of distress.

The Lament

The lament is the psalmist's cry when in great distress he has nowhere to turn but to God

We discover 3 types of complaints as we read through the lament

1. The psalmist may be troubled by his own thoughts and actions.
2. He may complain about the actions of others against him (the "enemies")
3. He may be frustrated by God himself.

Laments also follow a similar structure...

1. Invocation
2. Plea to God for help (e.g. Ps. 12:1; 17:1)
3. Complaints (e.g. Ps. 22:6-7)
4. Confession of sin or an assertion of innocence (e.g. 69:5)
5. Curse of enemies (e.g. Ps. 109:8-9)
6. Confidence in God's response (e.g. Ps. 54:4)
7. Hymn or blessing (e.g. Ps. 26:12)

Remember...

- Rarely will all 7 elements actually occur together, but a number of them will appear in each lament.
- There are also individual and national laments

Thanksgiving Psalms

The thanksgiving song is a response to answered lament . It is a praise to God for answered prayer.

Psalms of Confidence

The Psalms of Confidence frequently express trust in God's goodness and power (e.g. Ps. 11; 16; 23; 27; 62; 91; 121; 125; 131).

- Tone and content, rather than structure, bring them together
- These psalms contain striking metaphors which show an intimate awareness of God's presence on the part of the psalmist (e.g. refuge, shepherd, light, rock, and help)

Psalms of Remembrance

Psalms of remembrance are those in which God's past acts of redemption are the focus of attention (e.g. Ps. 78, 105, 106, 135, 136). God's acts are recounted so that Israel might praise him.

Wisdom Psalms

The wisdom books of the Bible emphasize a contrast in ways of living which bring about different consequences (e.g. Ps. 1)

Kingship Psalms

Two kinds

1. The king of Israel (e.g. Ps. 20, 21, 45)
2. God as King (e.g. Ps. 47:7; 98)

Concluding thoughts...

What a variety of ways to give praise to God!

The genres are flexible. Not every psalm fits solely into one category.