

NEW BEGINNINGS METHODIST CHURCH

PSALMS

THE TYPES OF PSALMS

LESSON DESCRIPTION

This lesson treats the various types, or genres, of Psalms including: prayers for help, trust songs, hymns of praise, thanksgiving songs, wisdom songs, royal songs, and liturgies.

INTRODUCTION TO HIGHER CRITICISMS

Higher criticism, also known as historical criticism or the historical-critical method, is an approach to biblical studies that emerged in the late 18th and 19th centuries. It aims to understand the Bible by examining its historical context, authorship, sources, and literary characteristics. Higher criticism seeks to analyze the Bible as a collection of human documents shaped by historical circumstances rather than viewing it solely as a divinely inspired text.

FORM CRITICISM

The psalms are highly conventional, with many of the poems following predictable (or at least recognizable) patterns. Based on these patterns, it is possible to group the psalms into broad categories, such as hymns of praise, songs of thanksgiving, or prayers for help. Form-critical interpretation pays attention to the common patterns that emerge from comparing the psalms and interprets each psalm as an example of a known type of psalm. Form criticism attempts not only to categorize by genre, but also by how the psalm was used in worship. Weaknesses to this approach are many.

PSALM TYPES (FORMS)

PRAYERS FOR HELP

(Pss. 3–7, 9, 10, 12–14, 17, 22, 25–28 and more)

Definition: the psalmist appeals to God for help.

Characteristics include:

- An address to God
 - Poetic Description of Crisis
 - Petition
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TRUST PSALMS

(Pss. 11, 16, 23, 27, 62–33, 91)

Definition: the psalmist expresses confidence that God can and will deliver him/her from their circumstances.

Characteristics include:

- Description of crisis
 - Expression of hope and confidence
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PRAISE HYMNS

(Pss. 8, 29, 33, 46, 120–134)

Definition: the psalmist praises the Lord for his character and works.

Characteristics include:

- Call to praise
- Reason to praise; often a description of the acts of attributes of God

Sub Categories of Psalms of Praise

- Creation songs (Pss. 19 and 104)
 - Enthronement songs (Pss. 47, 93, and 96–99)
 - Victory songs (Ps. 68)
 - Processional hymns (Pss. 84 and 122)
 - Zion songs (Pss. 46, 48, and 76)
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THANKSGIVING PSALMS

(Pss. 30, 32, 34, 40, 75, 107, 116, 118)

Definition: The song of thanksgiving assumes that a crisis has passed and the individual or community praises God in fulfillment of an earlier promise to praise (see above, the Prayer for Help). — NICOT¹

Characteristics include:

- Call to praise
 - Recollection of a past crisis
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INSTRUCTIONAL/WISDOM PSALMS

(Pss. 1, 19, 37, 49, 50, 73, 112, 119)

¹ Nancy DeClaisé-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth Laneel Tanner. *The Book of Psalms*, ed. E. J. Young, R. K. Harrison, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014).

Definition: These psalms often include a dualistic comparison between the righteous and the wicked, the wise and the fool, or God's way and the world's way. Some formal traits that occur in these psalms are happy are ... phrases (ʿašrê; perhaps better translated as "fortunate are ...") and a tone of instruction. One subcategory of the instructional psalm is the Torah psalm, which expressly instructs regarding the Lord's Torah. — NICOT

ROYAL PSALMS

(Pss. 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 144)

Definition: These psalms, as indicated above, are thematically related rather than related according to formal similarities. They are poems that were composed for specific events in the king's life or for other reasons related to the monarchy. The events may have included the king's coronation, marriage, or an impending military campaign. Other possibilities are prayers for the king to pray himself or to be prayed on his behalf. These psalms were retained in the canon following the end of Israel's and Judah's monarchies, and they became part of the seedbed of messianic hope—Israel's hope that one day the Lord would send the ideal Davidic king, the Messiah. — NICOT

LITURGIES

(Pss. 15, 24, 66, 113–118, 136)

Definition: These psalms were composed for various liturgical purposes. They share the obvious formal characteristic that certain parts may have been spoken by a given person or persons (such as a priest, the congregation, or the king). They also share the trait that liturgical actions can be intuited. Subcategories of these psalms include: the entrance liturgy, in which a person or party enters the temple; the festival psalm, which was used at one of Israel's three great festivals (Passover, Weeks, and Booths); and the pilgrimage psalm, which may have been used by the faithful as part of their pilgrimage to the temple for one of the festivals. — NICOT