

## The Book of Psalms

### Introduction – Part II(a)

#### Opening Prayer

In the first lesson in this bible study, we gave an overview of the Book of Psalms with special attention to: the place of Psalms and music in worship: the structure of the book, and interpreting the Psalms. As we conclude our introduction to the book in this lesson we want to give attention to the different literary genres and themes we will find in the Psalms.

#### Literary categories in Psalms

The following list of categories is offered as a means of helping us to understand the Psalms. Certainly others would come up with additional categories or classify the Psalms in a different way. While these categories are offered as a means of beginning to understand the Psalms, any particular Psalm may involve or overlap into another category.

1. Hymns/Songs of Praise
2. Complaint of the people as a community
3. Complaint of the individual
4. Thanksgiving songs
5. Royal Psalms
6. Wisdom Psalms

#### Hymns/Song of Praise – (Example Psalm 105)

Many of the Psalms are exactly what the title Psalm means, “songs of praise.” There is in many of these particular psalms a pattern that is followed.

Pattern of the songs of praise:

- a. Call to worship – *Psalm 105:1*
- b. Description of God’s acts or attributes – *Psalm 105:7, 43*
- c. A concluding praise – *Psalm 105:45*

Within the general category of hymns/songs of praise for the Psalms there also some subcategories. Think of these as thematic titles like what you might see at the top of hymns in the hymnal.

- a. Victory songs – *Psalm 68:1-2*
- b. Processional hymns – *Psalm 84:1-2*
  - i. Special note on “Songs of Ascent” – Psalms 120-134  
*What are particular songs that we tie to particular occasions?*
- c. Zion Songs – *Psalm 76:2*
- d. Enthronement songs – *Psalm 47:8-9*

### Complaint of the people as community – (Example Psalm 74)

As we begin to talk about this and the next category, we need to be clear what we mean by complaint. This isn't whining or complaining just to get something off my chest. This is a lament to the One who can actually answer.

*Is it ok just to vent to God?*

*Why is talking to God different than talking to another person?*

The complaint psalms, both of the community and of the individual, follow a particular pattern.

1. Address God with a cry for help – *Psalm 74:1*
2. A complaint about the peoples' suffering – *Psalm 74:4, 9, 11*
3. A confession of trust – *Psalm 74:12*
4. A petition for rescue – *Psalm 74:19*
5. An appeal to God's reputation – *Psalm 74:18*
6. A vow of praise – *Psalm 74:21*

### Complaint of the individual – (Example Psalm 22)

The example Psalm used for this category is also a Messianic psalm, that is it prophesies of Jesus! Messianic Psalms could be their own category but they crossover into some of the other categories also. For example a royal psalm about the king may in fact also have prophetic notions about the King of Kings. So here the example song used for this category is tied to Jesus Christ and His suffering on the cross. This is also the Psalm that is used for the “stripping of the altar” on Maunday Thursday. Complaints of the individual are also the largest category of psalms.

1. Address God with a cry for help – *Psalm 22:1*
2. Poetic complaint – *Psalm 22:12-15*
3. Confession of trust – *Psalm 22:4*
4. Petition – *Psalm 22:19-21*

5. Argument from God's care in the past – *Psalm 22:9-10*
6. Vow of praise – *Psalm 22:22*
7. Confidence in God's answer – *Psalm 22:24*

\*\*\*\*\* Looking Ahead \*\*\*\*\*

In the next lesson we will finish looking at the literary categories of the Psalms.

Closing Prayer