

## Royal, Torah, and Other Psalm Types

So far, we have looked at psalms of lament (including imprecatory psalms), psalms of praise, and psalms of thanksgiving. Together, these account for the structure of roughly 2/3rds of all the psalms. We have two more major categories I want you to be aware of. Scholars who specialize in studying psalms have many sub-classifications so in your other reading or study you may come across several other classifications such as psalms of ascent, hymn psalms, etc. I will mention a few of these that we may come across later, but the goal was to get you familiar with several of the most common major types.

I realize that all this focus on psalm types can seem a bit academic but there are a couple reasons we are spending time on this. The first reason is that by understanding how the various psalms are built we are better able to interpret them and apply them in our own worship and prayer. When we understand the form and structure of a psalm, we can more easily see what is being emphasized, which subjects are taking up more of the psalmist's attention, and how one subject transitions into another.

The second reason is that recognizing these psalm types are going to be helpful as we look to connect the Book of Psalms to the New Testament. People generally focus on the content of individual psalms and their relationship to Jesus but each of these psalm types had a function in the life and worship of Israel and that worship in its entirety was designed to point to Christ.

The three main types we have already studied are identified by their form and structure. The remaining two we will look at are identified by their content. We can recognize them because of what they say rather than how what they say is organized. Keep in mind, it is possible for a psalm to fall into more than one classification based upon its form, structure, and content.

### Royal Psalms

**Royal Psalms:** One of the main ideas of the Book of Psalms is God as king. God is described as king and attention is also drawn to the anointed human king as God's representative through whom God rules over His chosen people. Psalms whose main emphasis is on the rule of God or the rule of the king are classified as Royal Psalms. I have bolded and underlined the "royal" elements in our example from Psalm 2 below.

1. **Messianic Psalms:** One of the sub-types of the Royal Psalms are the messianic psalms. All of the Royal Psalms are in some sense messianic in that the anointed ruler from David's line as well as the Divine King of Israel find their culmination in Jesus Christ. Even so, there are a subset of these Royal Psalms that are so clearly or explicitly pointing to the fulfillment of the messianic promise that they stand apart from the rest. The clearest of these are Psalm 2, 22, 45, 69, 72, 80, 110, 118.
2. **Enthronement Psalms:** You will sometimes see references to what are called enthronement or "Yahweh Malak" psalms.<sup>1</sup> This includes psalms 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99. Many scholars speculated that these psalms were used in festivals where the enthronement of Yahweh was celebrated. Although some Israel's neighbors held similar festivals for their gods there is no evidence of any such festival in the life of Israel. Nevertheless, the designation as enthronement psalms stuck.

### Royal Psalm Example (Psalm 2)

---

<sup>1</sup> Yahweh malak means Yahweh rules and several of these psalms begin with that phrase.

## Other Psalm Types

- 2 Why do the nations rage  
and the peoples plot in vain?
- 2 **The kings of the earth set themselves,  
and the rulers take counsel  
together,  
against the LORD and against his  
Anointed, saying,**
- 3 **“Let us burst their bonds apart  
and cast away their cords from us.”**
- 4 He who sits in the heavens laughs;  
the Lord holds them in derision.
- 5 Then he will speak to them in his wrath,  
and terrify them in his fury, saying,
- 6 **“As for me, I have set my King  
on Zion, my holy hill.”**
- 7 I will tell of the decree:
- The LORD said to me, “You are my Son;  
today I have begotten you.
- 8 **Ask of me, and I will make the  
nations your heritage,  
and the ends of the earth your  
possession.**
- 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron  
and dash them in pieces like a potter’s  
vessel.”
- 10 **Now therefore, O kings, be wise;  
be warned, O rulers of the earth.**
- 11 **Serve the LORD with fear,  
and rejoice with trembling.**
- 12 Kiss the Son,  
lest he be angry, and you perish in the  
way,  
for his wrath is quickly kindled.  
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

### Homework:

Like our previous homework, I would like you to pray through Psalm 2 throughout the week. I am not asking for you to pray the actual words this week (although you certainly can). What I would like is for you to use the truths in this psalm to pray for each of the groups (yourself, others, the church). Please then share on the discussion board how you applied the psalm.

1. How did you pray for yourself considering the truths in this psalm?
2. How can we pray for believers we know considering the truths in this psalm?
3. How about unbelievers?
4. How might we pray for our church considering this psalm?

### Torah Psalms

**Torah Psalms:** Often called wisdom psalms, these highlight the wisdom of following God’s law and His rule. They often emphasize a contrast between the path of the righteous and that of the wicked and/or contain admonishment and blessing formulas. “Blessed is he...”, “better...”, etc. Today we often think of the law of God very narrowly as commandments. The Torah, however, is broader than just commandments and these psalms engage with it in a broad sense. It may be more helpful for you to think in terms of God’s Word or God’s revelation than in terms of God’s commands. Some of these psalms, such as psalm 1, 19, and 119 stand out for their direct emphasis on Torah while others may be more generally focused on the wisdom of serving God.

## Other Psalm Types

### Torah Psalm Example (Psalm 1)

- 1** Blessed is the man  
    who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,  
    nor stands in the way of sinners,  
    nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
- 2** but his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
    and on his law he meditates day and night.
- 3** He is like a tree  
    planted by streams of water  
    that yields its fruit in its season,  
    and its leaf does not wither.  
In all that he does, he prospers.
- 4** The wicked are not so,  
    but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
- 5** Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
    nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
- 6** for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,  
    but the way of the wicked will perish.

### A Few Other Minor or Sub-Types

There are a few of the minor types of psalms that we are not going to study but that I wanted to mention because I may make reference to them in future classes when we discuss the overall structure of the Psalter and the Book of Psalms as prophecy.

- 1. Trust Psalms:** There are several psalms that emphasize the trust of the psalmist in God. These can often be similar to lament psalms but without the same sense of urgency connected to a particular distress. They are sometimes also like the Torah psalms in contrasting those who trust God and those who oppose them. They are sometimes considered their own major psalm type but both in terms of content and structure they are fluid. They are, however, wonderful psalms for us in times where we need comfort (11, 16, 23, 91, 121, 125, 129, 131).
- 2. Historical Psalms:** Several psalms recount the history of God's covenant faithfulness and providing salvation for His people. (see Ps. 78 as an example).
- 3. Creation Psalms:** Another major theme of the Book of Psalms is God as Creator. Often connected closely with God's rule and power these psalms emphasize God as the source and sovereign of the universe. God is the one who creates, orders, and sustains the world. Psalm 8 is a well-known example.
- 4. Acrostic Psalms:** Several of the psalms are organized so that each line begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In some cases, the letters are in perfect sequence and in others they would be more semi-acrostic. (9-10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145).

# Other Psalm Types

## Conclusion on Psalm Types

As we reflect upon the various psalm types, we can see how the major types provide a voice to believers throughout the range of life's experiences and emotions. We can think of these types as forming a spectrum of ways to express ourselves to God.



The author to Hebrews comforts us with the knowledge that Jesus experienced what it was like to be one of us saying, *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”* (Heb. 4:15-16).

We have in the Psalms an inspired set of human words to God. It is clear from the Gospels that the self-identity of Jesus was tightly connected to the psalms as he frequently referenced them regarding Himself. In the same way the humanity of Jesus can be a comfort to us the humanity of the Psalms is also a comfort in giving us liberty in our prayers and petitions to God. There are many connections to Jesus that we will develop as we go through the course, but I hope you are already beginning to see that all the various types of psalms are connected to God's promises. The praise, the thanks, the petitions, and even the judgments all draw upon God's promise of redemption and His promise to be the king of His people. We will begin exploring this further as we move on from here.