



Glossary

Psalm Genres

Scholars group similar psalms into genres to make them easier to discuss. The discovery book, *Discovering Hope in the Psalms*, describes these psalm genres.

Royal Psalm: A psalm about the monarchy descended from David. Psalm 2 is a royal psalm that was probably sung at coronations.

Song of Confidence: A psalm which declares confidence in some aspect of the Lord's care. Psalm 23 is a song of confidence.

Torah Psalm: A type of wisdom psalm that extols God's instructions to us. (*Torah* means "law" or "instructions.") Psalm 1 is a Torah psalm.

Wisdom Psalm: A psalm written to instruct us in God's ways. Psalm 73 is a wisdom psalm.

Lament: A petition for help in affliction. A prayer about things gone wrong—a "prayer request" psalm. Psalms 42-43, 51, and 71 are laments.

Praise Psalm: A psalm written to praise God. This broad category includes thanksgiving psalms and hymns. Some psalms fit both categories.

Thanksgiving Psalm: A psalm that thanks God for answering a specific prayer. Also called **declarative praise psalms** because they publicly declare deliverance. Psalm 30 is a thanksgiving psalm.

Hymn: A psalm that praises God for who he is and what he's done in human history. Hymns are also known as **descriptive praise psalms** because they describe God's nature. Psalm 146 is a hymn.

Other Psalm Designations

These designations aren't psalm genres, but are additional ways to group psalms.

Doxology: The close to a book of psalms. Books I-IV each have a one-verse doxology (for example, Psalm 41:13). Psalms 146-150 close not just Book V, but the entire Psalter.

Hallelujah Psalms: Psalms 146-150 (the Psalter's doxology) begin and end with "Hallelujah!" (or in some translations, "Praise the LORD!"). They are therefore sometimes called the Hallelujah psalms.

Messianic Psalm: A psalm which the New Testament applies to Jesus. The royal psalm, Psalm 2, is a messianic psalm that foretells the crowning of Jesus as the Anointed One—Messiah.

Orphan Psalm: A psalm lacking an inscription naming the author.

Penitential Psalm: One of the seven psalms which the early Christian church chose for expressing repentance in church services. Psalm 51 is a penitential psalm.

Psalter: Another name for the book of Psalms in the Old Testament.

Words and Phrases Found in Psalms

Hallelujah: The English word *hallelujah* is a transliteration of the two Hebrew words that mean *praise the Lord*.

Maskil: This is sometimes translated *A Contemplative Poem*, but the precise meaning isn't known. It might be a musical term.

Messiah: In Psalm 2:2, the word translated *anointed* is the Hebrew word from which we get our English word *messiah*. David and the kings descended from him were anointed for office and so were messiahs. The prophets foretold the destruction of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, but they promised a new Messiah, Jesus.

Sacrifice of Praise: In Old Testament times, an Israelite who wanted to show gratitude for granted prayers and other blessings would bring a **thanksgiving peace offering**—also called a sacrifice of praise—to the temple. It consisted of a perfect animal and a mix of breads (Leviticus 7:11-34).

Poetry Terms

Anthropomorphism: Assigning human traits to God, animals, or objects. When anthropomorphism is used to describe God, it's usually done so to communicate a truth about him.

Chiasm: A poetic structure in which the outer elements are parallel and the inner elements are parallel (KEY-asm; *chi* is the Greek name for the letter *X*). Many verses in Psalms and Proverbs are arranged in a chiasm: A B / B' A'. In some Psalms, stanzas are arranged in a chiasm, with the center being the psalm's theme. Additionally, some groups of psalms are arranged topically in a chiasm.

Enclosure: Repeating something from the beginning of a poem at the end of the poem. Enclosure is a type of parallelism in which the first and last verses (and/or the halfway point) share an element. *Enclosure* is also called *inclusio*, *inclusion*, and *envelope*.

Hyperbole: Poetic overstatement.

Imagery: Word pictures especially used to describe difficult abstract concepts in a way that touches our emotions and helps us understand multiple layers of meaning through mental images.

Metaphor: A comparison in which one thing is said to be another thing (“the LORD *is* my shepherd” in Psalm 23:1). A long metaphor is called an **allegory**.

Personification: Giving human characteristics to an animal, object, or abstract idea to create imagery.

Parallelism: Most line segments in Hebrew poetry use parallelism: They say something similar in multiple ways, giving us different ways to grasp the poet's meaning.

Parallelism, Arrangement: Parallelism is symbolized by using letters to represent units and a **prime mark** (“ ’ ”) to show how many times a unit has been repeated. Here are three common arrangements:

- **Normal parallelism:** A B / A' B'

- **Incomplete parallelism:** A / B C D / B' C' D' / B'' C'' D''
- **Chiastic parallelism:** A B / B' A'

Parallelism, Types: Parallel units relate to each other in different ways. Here are three common types of parallelism:

- **Synonymous Parallelism:** Parallel units use **synonyms** (words with similar meanings) to express the same idea in a similar way (for instance, *wicked* in one line segment and *sinner*s in the parallel segment in Psalm 1:5)
- **Antithetical Parallelism:** Parallel units use **antonyms** (words with opposite meanings) to contrast ideas (“way of the righteous” and “way of the wicked” in Psalm 1:6)
- **Synthetic Parallelism:** Parallel units do something else, such as complete a thought (“are not so” and “are like chaff” in Psalm 1:4)

Poetic Line: A Hebrew poem’s basic unit, often consisting of two line segments. Many Bible versions place the first line segment at the left margin and indent the rest of the segments about one-quarter inch. A third level of indention, to about one-half inch, means the line was too long to fit within the margins so it wraps.

Poetic Line Segment: In Hebrew poetry, most poetic lines have two segments, although some have three or four and a few have only one. In scholarly works, a line segment is often called a **colon** (plural **cola**) or **verset**.

Refrain: When used in Psalms, a verse repeated multiple times in a psalm.

Simile: A comparison between two different things that uses the word *like* or the word *as* to describe a similarity (for example, “He is *like* a tree.”) When a simile grows into a story, it’s called a **parable**.

Stanza: A group of related poetic lines. It’s similar to a paragraph, which in prose is a group of related sentences. In scholarly works, a group of related poetic lines is often called a **strophe** (rhymes with *trophy*), and a group of **strophes** (rhymes with *trophies*) is called a stanza.

Type: A person or thing that foreshadows something greater to come. Israel was a type of the heavenly kingdom, and King David was a type of King Jesus.

Sources

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