

Psalms

Praising and Petitioning God					
	Book 1 (1–41)	Book 2 (42–72)	Book 3 (73–89)	Book 4 (90–106)	Book 5 (107–150)
Number of Psalms	41	31	17	17	44
Authors and Number of Psalms Authored	David-37 Anon-4	David-18 Korah-7 Anon-4 Solomon-1 Asaph-1	Asaph-11 Korah-3 Ethan-1 Heman-1 David-1	Anon-14 David-2 Moses-1	Anon-28 David-15 Solomon-1
Prominent Type	Lament-22	Lament-21	Lament-9	Praise-12	Praise-22
Closing Doxology	41:13	72:18-19	89:52	106:48	150:1-6
Possible Compiler	David	Hezekiah or Josiah		Ezra or Nehemiah	
Possible Compilation Dates	c. 1020-970 BC	c. 970-610 BC		Until c. 430 BC	
Span of Authorship	About 1000 Years (c. 1410-430 BC)				

Key Word: Praise

Key Verse: “Praise the LORD. I will extol the LORD with all my heart in the council of the upright and in the assembly” (Psalm 111:1).

Summary Statement:

Praise and petition God for who He is and what He has done in providing wisdom, protection, Messianic fulfillment, and His Word to be humble before Him in trust and thanksgiving.

Application:

Praise God for who He is as well as for what He’s done.

Honestly state your complaint to God since He knows you fully anyway.

Psalms

Introduction

I. Titles

- A. **Hebrew:** The Hebrew Bible calls this the *Book of Praises* (סֵפֶר תְּהִלִּים), abbreviated to *Praises* (תְּהִלִּים or תְּלִין or תְּלִים). Although the word “praise” occurs often in the Psalter, Psalm 145 is the only psalm with the *title* “praise” (תְּהִלָּה). However, Westermann notes that even every lament psalm includes praise (except maybe Psalm 88) since all lament psalms progress beyond petition and lament to praise God (*The Praise of God in the Psalms*, 74).
- B. **Greek:** The Septuagint (LXX) translated the Hebrew word *mizmor* (מִזְמוֹר) as “psalm” (ψαλμός)—the technical word for a song sung to the accompaniment of a plucked (i.e., stringed) instrument.
- C. **English:** Three English titles (The Psalms, The Psalter, and The Book of Psalms) are derived from the Greek and Latin titles (*Psalmoi*, *Psalterian* and *Liber Psalmorum*, respectively).

II. Authorship

- A. **External Evidence:** Many scholars have challenged the superscriptions of many psalms, especially recently. Much of the debate centers on the use of the Hebrew preposition לְ, *lamed*, which can be translated “to,” “for,” “of,” and several other ways (e.g., “A Psalm to David,” “A Psalm for David,” “A Psalm of David,” etc.). However, its “use to designate authorship has been well attested in the Northwest Semitic inscriptions, other Semitic dialects such as Arabic, and other biblical passages such as Habakkuk 3:1 (‘of Habakkuk’)” (Ross, *BKC*, 1:782). Therefore, the traditional meaning that attributes authorship to these men is well substantiated.
- B. **Internal Evidence:** Fifty psalms are anonymous, but the Psalter names seven different authors in 100 of the psalms (in descending order regarding the number of psalms each contributed):
1. David (second king of Israel), whose name means “Beloved of Yahweh” (73 pss. mostly in Books I and II), wrote the most psalms
 2. Asaph (a famous musician and Levite from Gershon), “Collector” (12 pss.: Pss. 50, 73–83)
 3. The sons of Korah (a guild of singers and composers who descended from Levi in the line of Kohath), “Bald” (10 pss.: Pss. 42, 44–49, 84, 85, 87)
 4. Solomon, (third king of Israel and son of David and Bathsheba), “Peaceful” (2 pss.: Pss. 72, 127)
 5. Moses (Israel’s leader out of Egyptian bondage and author of the oldest psalm), “Son of the Water” (Ps. 90)
 6. Heman the Ezrahite (like the sons of Korah he was a Levite from the family of Kohath), “Faithful” (Ps. 88)
 7. Ethan the Ezrahite (a Levite from the family of Merari), “Enduring” (Ps. 89)

III. Circumstances

- A. **Date:** The various psalms were written over nearly a 1000-year period from the time of Moses (Ps. 90; ca. 1410 BC) to the postexilic period under Ezra and Nehemiah (Ps. 126; ca. 430 BC).
- B. **Recipients:** The Book of Psalms served as a hymnal for the nation of Israel in its worship at the temple and as a devotional guide for the Jewish people.
- C. **Occasion:** David and Asaph organized Israel's worship around 1000 BC. Some of King David's hymns were probably collected then and used in the first temple under Solomon. Since *Book of Praises* was the original name of the entire Book, the collection was probably named such as the hymnbook of the second temple built by Zerubbabel with its worship re-established by Nehemiah (Neh. 12:46). The reason people need this collection is straightforward: We must praise and petition God for who He is and what He has done in providing wisdom, protection, Messianic fulfillment, and His Word to be humble before Him in trust and thanksgiving.

IV. Characteristics

- A. Psalms is the most diverse book of the Old Testament.
1. The *content* of the Psalms covers a tremendous breadth of material (jubilation, war, peace, worship, judgment, messianic prophecy, praise, and complaint).
 2. The *events* stretch back to Creation and the patriarchal, theocratic, monarchical, exilic, and postexilic periods.
- B. Psalms is the longest book in the Bible in terms of chapters and in words:

Book	Chapters	Verses	Words
Psalms	150	2461	43,743
Jeremiah	52	1364	42,659
Ezekiel	48	1273	39,407
Genesis	50	1533	38,267
Isaiah	66	1292	37,044

http://www.kneeholedesk.com/Pages/Did_You_Know/Books_of_the_Bible.html

- C. Psalms is the most quoted book of the Old Testament in the NT (119 or more times).
- D. Psalm 23 is the most quoted and memorized poem in history.
- E. Psalms is likely the most loved book in the Bible that has ministered to more people in more situations in more periods than any other biblical book.

Argument

Classification by Book: Psalms is a songbook that facilitates the worship of Israel, especially corporately. However, the reason for placing the psalms into five books (listed below) has long perplexed scholars. Each book concludes with a doxology, but why certain psalms are classified into each book is unknown, partly due to the difficulty in categorizing each psalm. The fivefold division has been explained in at least three ways:

1. The Jews believed that the five sections *mirror the Pentateuch* (cf. Jensen's chart, next page), but these appear to have no correspondence.
2. Herbert C. Leupold and A. A. Anderson both postulate that the divisions have resulted in one book at a time from *chronological development* (cf. Jensen on the next page and Ralph Smith on p. 389). This is probably the better explanation.

Summary Statement for the Book

Praise and petition God for who He is and what He has done in providing wisdom, protection, Messianic fulfillment, and His Word to be humble before Him in trust and thanksgiving.

PSALMS

Chart 43

BLESS THE LORD, O MY SOUL

BOOK I	BOOK II	BOOK III	BOOK IV	BOOK V
41 psalms	31 psalms	17 psalms	17 psalms	44 psalms
1	42	73	90	107
41:13	72:18-19	89:52	106:48	150:6
<i>DOXOLOGY AT THESE VERSES</i>				
ADORING WORSHIP	WONDERING WORSHIP	CEASELESS WORSHIP	SUBMISSIVE WORSHIP	PERFECTED WORSHIP
GENESIS —man—	EXODUS —Israel—	LEVITICUS —sanctuary—	NUMBERS —Moses and wilderness—	DEUTERONOMY —Law and land—
<i>TOPICAL LIKENESS TO PENTATEUCH</i>				
mainly (or all) DAVID	mainly DAVID and KORAH	mainly ASAPH	mainly ANONYMOUS	mainly DAVID
A	U	T	H	O
ORIGINAL GROUP BY DAVID	BOOKS II AND III ADDED DURING THE REIGNS OF HEZEKIAH AND JOSIAH		MISCELLANEOUS COLLECTIONS COMPILED IN TIMES OF EZRA AND NEHEMIAH	

POSSIBLE STAGES OF COLLECTION

Irving L. Jensen, *Jensen's Bible Charts*

Individual Psalms Classified Generally

Classification by Individual Psalm: Several attempts at classifying the individual psalms have been made, but probably Westermann, *The Praise of God in the Psalms* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1965), 25-35, has the best broad divisions. He suggests that two broad categories—either "praise" or "lament" (petition)—describe every individual psalm. These two broad categories break down further into the following outline (abbreviations supplied by me):

Praise			Lament (Petition)		
Declarative		Descriptive	Individual		People
Individual	People		Open	Heard	
DPI	DPP	DSP	LIO	LIH	LOP
1	2	3	4	5	6

In outline form, the above chart can be described in the following manner:

I. Praise (P): *Worship of God for what He has done or who He is*

A. Declarative Praise (DP): Worship of God for what He has done—*Actions of God*

1. Declarative Praise of the Individual (DPI): Worship of God for what He has done for an individual
2. Declarative Praise of the People (DPP): Worship of God for what He has done for the congregation

B. Descriptive Praise (DSP): Worship of God for who He is—*Attributes of God*.

These are not divided into the individual and people/congregation subcategories since the distinction of the subject cannot be made except in a few of these psalms)

II. Lament/Petition (L): *Request from God based on what He has done or who He is*

A. Lament (Petition) of the Individual (LI): Request of God by one person

4. Lament (Petition) Not Answered (Open) (LIO): Request of God before the answer
5. Lament (Petition) Heard (LIH): Testimony of an answered request of God

B. Lament (Petition) of the People (LP): Request of God by the entire congregation

This classification results in six types of psalms as listed by number in the left hand column above. Each of these six types has specific components that normally occur, but not always. These are listed on the next page in their respective categories.

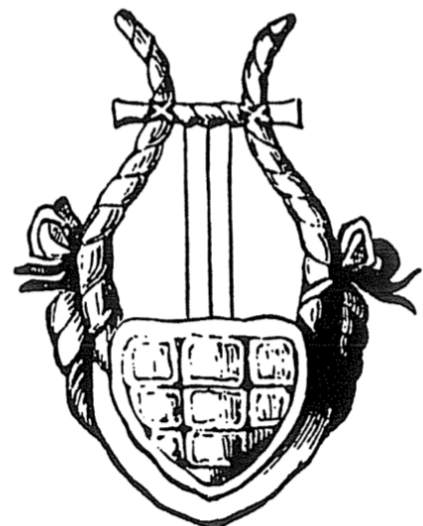
Components of Six Types of Psalms

Claus Westermann

Type (see previous page):

6	2	4	5	1	3
Petition of the people	Declarative praise of the people	Petition of the individual (open)	Petition of the individual (heard)	Declarative praise of the individual	Descriptive Praise
Introductory petition	(Let Israel say so)	Introduction	—		
Lament	Looking back to the time of need	Lament	Lament		
Confession of confidence	Report of the deliverance	Confession of Confidence	Confession of Confidence		
Petition		Petition	Petition		
(Double wish)		Double wish	(Double wish)		
		(Confidence of being heard)	(Confidence of being heard)		
Vow of praise		Vow of praise	Vow of praise	Announcement	
				Introductory summary	
			Praise (declarative)	Report of deliverance 1. Looking back to the time of need 2. I cried 3. He heard 4. He drew me out	
				Vow of praise	Call to praise
				Praise (descriptive)	Praise 1. Yahweh is great (a) the Creator (b) the Lord of history 2. Yahweh is good (a) he saves (b) he gives bread
					Conclusion

Arrows indicate similar sections



Classification of Each Psalm

F. Duane Lindsey, DTS Class Handout

Dr. F. Duane Lindsey feels that the previous six Westermann categories need to be completed more since several psalms have a didactic or teaching theme (rather than being either praise or lament). Therefore, he adds a third primary type of psalms called Didactic Psalms. He also breaks down the lament psalms and descriptive praise psalms into further categories:

LAMENT				DECLARATIVE PRAISE		DESCRIPTIVE PRAISE 3				DIDACTIC			
LAMENT PSALMS		SONGS OF TRUST		ACKNOWLEDGMENT PSALMS		Hymns Proper	Songs of God's Kingship	Songs of Zion	Royal Psalms	Wisdom Psalms	Torah Psalms	Other	
4 Lament of the Individual open)---(heard	5 Lament of the People	6 Trust of the Individual	7 Trust of the People	1 Individual Thanksgiving	2 Cosmual Thanksgiving								
5 7 12 14 17	3 6 9/10 13	4 11 16		(18) (21) (22)		8 19:1-6 24 29 33 367			2 18 20 21	1	157 19:7-14		
25 26 28 31	22 27 28 31	23 (27)		30 32 34									
367 38 39 40:12-17 41 42/43 51 53 55 57 59 61 637	35 38 39 40:12-17 41 42/43 51 53 54 56 58 60 64	40:1-11	467	527	467		47	467 48	45	367 37	49	50 52	
69 70 77 71	74 79 80 82 83 85 90 94			66:13-20	65 66:1-12 67 687	(66) 757 787						68 81	
88 86	88 86			92			93	84 87	89	91			
102							95	96 97 98 99					
108 109	106			107					101				
120	1157		1157	116 118 121					110	112			
130	123 126 1297	131	1297	124	124			122			119		
1397 140 141 142 143	137	1397		138					132	127 128 133	1347		
							135 136 1397			1397			
							145 146 147 148 149 150	144					
Totals	50	17	10	4	14	8	26	6	6	11	12	4	4

= 172 due to overlap

Special categories or topics:

- Alphabetical psalms: 9/10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145
- Creation psalms: 8, 19, 29, 33, 104, 148
- Exodus psalms: 44, 66, 68, 74, 77, 78, 80, 81, 83, 95, 105, 106, 114, 135, 136
- Imprecatory psalms: 7, 35, 65, 58, 59, 67, (79), 83, 109, 137, 139:19-22
- Innocence psalms: 7, 15, 17, 26
- Penitential psalms: 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143
- Pilgrim psalms: 157, 247, 42-43, 507, 787, 817, 84, 877, 917, 957, 1007, 120-134
- Torah psalms: 1, 157, 19:7-14, 247, 119, 1347

Themes of Each Psalm

Book One: Psalms 1—41

Book Three: Psalms 73—89

Book Two: Psalms 42—72

Book Five: Psalms 107—150

1. Two Ways of Life Contrasted
2. Coronation of the LORD's Anointed
3. Victory in the Face of Defeat
4. Evening Prayer for Deliverance
5. Morning Prayer for Guidance
6. Prayer for God's Mercy
7. Wickedness Justly Rewarded
8. God's Glory and Man's Dominion
9. Praise for Victory over Enemies
10. Petition for God's Judgment
11. God Tests the Sons of Men
12. The Pure Words of the LORD
13. The Prayer for God's Answer—Now
14. The Characteristics of the Godless
15. The Characteristics of the Godly
16. Eternal Life for One Who Trusts
17. "Hide Me Under the Shadow of Your Wings"
18. Thanksgiving for Deliverance by God
19. The Works and Word of God
20. Trust Not in Chariots and Horses but in God
21. Triumph of the King
22. Psalm of the Cross
23. Psalm of the Divine Shepherd
24. Psalm of the King of Glory
25. Acrostic Prayer for Instruction
26. "Examine Me, O LORD, and Prove Me"
27. Trust in the LORD and Be Not Afraid
28. Rejoice Because of Answered Prayer
29. The Powerful Voice of God
30. Praise for Dramatic Deliverance
31. "Be of Good Courage"
32. The Blessedness of Forgiveness
33. God Considers All Man's Works
34. Seek the LORD
35. Petition for God's Intervention
36. The Excellent Lovingkindness of God
37. "Rest in the LORD"
38. The Heavy Burden of Sin
39. Know the Measure of Man's Days
40. Delight to Do God's Will
41. The Blessedness of Helping the Poor
73. The Perspective of Eternity
74. Request for God to Remember His Covenant
75. "God Is the Judge"
76. The Glorious Might of God
77. When Overwhelmed, Remember God's Greatness
78. God's Continued Guidance in Spite of Unbelief
79. Avenge the Defilement of Jerusalem
80. Israel's Plea for God's Mercy
81. God's Plea for Israel's Obedience
82. Rebuke of Israel's Urgent Judges
83. Plea for God to Destroy Israel's Enemies
84. The Joy of Dwelling with God
85. Prayer for Revival
86. "Teach Me Your Way, O LORD"
87. Glorious Zion, City of God
88. Crying from Deepest Affliction
89. Claiming God's Promises in Affliction
90. "Teach Us to Number Our Days"
91. Abiding in "the Shadow of the Almighty"
92. It Is Good to Praise the LORD
93. The Majesty of God
94. Vengeance Belongs Only to God
95. Call to Worship the LORD
96. Declare the Glory of God
97. Rejoice! The LORD Reigns!
98. Sing a New Song to the LORD
99. "Exalt the LORD Our God"
100. "Serve the LORD with Gladness"
101. Commitments of a Holy Life
102. Prayer of an Overwhelmed Saint
103. Bless the LORD, All You People!
104. Psalm Rehearsing Creation
105. Remember, God Keeps His Promises
106. "We Have Sinned"
107. God Satisfies the Longing Soul
108. Awake Early and Praise the LORD
109. Song of the Slandered
110. The Coming of the Priest-King-Judge
111. Praise for God's Tender Care
112. The Blessings of Those Who Fear God
113. The Condescending Grace of God
114. In Praise for the Exodus
115. To God Alone Be the Glory
116. Love the LORD for What He Has Done
117. The Praise of All Peoples
118. Better to Trust God than Man
119. An Acrostic in Praise of the Scriptures
120. A Cry in Distress
121. God Is Our Keeper
122. "Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem"
123. Plea for the Mercy of God
124. God Is on Our Side
125. Trust in the LORD and Abide Forever
126. "Sow in Tears, Reap in Joy"
127. Children Are God's Heritage
128. Blessing on the House of the God-fearing
129. Plea of the Persecuted
130. "My Soul Waits for the LORD"
131. A Childlike Faith
132. Trust in the God of David
133. Beauty of the Unity of the Brethren
134. Praise the LORD in the Evening
135. God Has Done Great Things!
136. God's Mercy Endures Forever
137. Tears in Exile
138. God Answered My Prayer
139. "Search Me, O God"
140. Preserve Me from Violence
141. Set a Guard, O LORD, over My Mouth
142. "No One Cares for My Soul"
143. "Teach Me to Do Your Will"
144. "What Is Man?"
145. Testify to God's Great Acts
146. "Do Not Put Your Trust in Princes"
147. God Heals the Brokenhearted
148. All Creation Praises the LORD
149. "The LORD Takes Pleasure in His People"
150. "Praise the LORD"

Fulfilled Messianic Prophecies in the Psalms

PSALM	PROPHECY	FULFILLMENT
2:7	God will declare Him to be His Son	Matthew 3:17
8:6	All things will be put under His feet	Hebrews 2:8
16:10	He will be resurrected from the dead	Mark 16:6-7
22:1	God will forsake Him in His hour of need	Matthew 27:46
22:7-8	He will be scorned and mocked	Luke 23:35
22:16	His hands and feet will be pierced	John 20:25,27
22:18	Others will gamble for His clothes	Matthew 27:35-36
34:20	Not one of His bones will be broken	John 19:32-33,36
35:11	He will be accused by false witnesses	Mark 14:57
35:19	He will be hated without a cause	John 15:25
40:7-8	He will come to do God's will	Hebrews 10:7
41:9	He will be betrayed by a friend	Luke 22:47
45:6	His throne will be forever	Hebrews 1:8
68:18	He will ascend to God's right hand	Mark 16:19
69:9	Zeal for God's house will consume Him	John 2:17
69:21	He will be given vinegar and gall to drink	Matthew 27:34
109:4	He will pray for His enemies	Luke 23:34
109:8	His betrayer's office will be fulfilled by another	Acts 1:20
110:1	His enemies will be made subject to Him	Matthew 22:44
110:4	He will be a priest like Melchizedek	Hebrews 5:6
118:22	He will be the chief cornerstone	Matthew 21:42
118:26	He will come in the name of the Lord	Matthew 21:9

Talk Thru the Bible, 155

The Psalms in History

Ralph Smith, "The Use and Influence of the Psalms," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 27 (Fall 1984): 5-16

I. The Origin of the Psalms (Smith, 10-11)

- A. The Singing Community
 - 1. Praise (Moses in Exod. 15:1-18)
 - 2. Lament (Deborah in Jud. 5:19)
- B. David
 - 1. Praise (1 Chron. 23:1-27:1)
 - 2. Lament (2 Sam. 1:17-27)
- C. Others

II. Compilation Hypothesis of A. A. Anderson (Smith, 11)

- A. Davidic (Pss. 3-41): emphasizes the name of Yahweh (272 times) over Elohim (15 times)
- B. Davidic (51-72): all have titles except 66-67, 71-72 (72:20 but 18 Davidic psalms follow!)
- C. Korahite (42, 44-49) and Elohist Asaphite (50, 73-83)
- D. Yahwistic Asaphite (84-85, 87-88), David (86), Ethan (89)
- E. Final Divisions (90-150)
 - 1. Enthronement (95-99): also called messianic or kingdom psalms
 - 2. Davidic (108-110, 138-145)
 - 3. Ascent (120-134)
 - 4. Hallelujah (111-118, 146-150)
- F. Arrangement into Five Books (1-41; 42-72; 73-89; 90-106; 107-150)
 - 1. Psalms extolling the Law added (1, 119)
 - 2. Psalm 2 extolling the Messiah added

III. Usage by Christians (Smith, 7-9)

- A. First to Fourth Centuries (Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Dionysius of Alexandria, Jerome)
- B. Fourth to Fifth Centuries
 - 1. Ambrose, Augustine
 - 2. Pope Gregory I
 - 3. St. Patrick, "Apostle of Ireland"
- C. Sixth to Sixteenth Centuries (Eastern Church)
- D. Sixteenth Century Reformation
 - 1. Luther
 - 2. Edward VI and Church of England
- E. Vatican II (1963-65)
- F. Modern Disuse (3 reasons)
 - 1. Time: No one has the time to read or recite the psalms each week or month
 - 2. Relevance: The gap between biblical times and our age must be bridged
 - 3. Theology: Some texts are deemed "sub-Christian" (e.g., Ps. 51:11; 109:6, 19; 137:9)

Hebrew Poetry & Parallelism

I. Hebrew Poetry

- A. Uniqueness of Psalms compared to Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon

- B. Characteristics of Hebrew Poetry
 - 1. Stress Patterns or Rhythm (Kidner) or Meter (Ross): Accented words per line appear, though no one knows if Hebrew poetry contains a metrical pattern since the pronunciation of ancient Hebrew has not been preserved.
 - 2. Evocative Language: A concentrated form of discourse using earthy and militaristic images, symbols, figures, emotive vocabulary, and multiple meanings allows the psalmist to convey several things simultaneously (Ross, *BKC*, 1:780).
 - 3. Acrostic Arrangement: Sometimes, it has an alphabetical sequence, with each verse beginning with a different consecutive letter of the Hebrew alphabet (Pss. 9–10 [one poem], 25, 34, 37, 111–112; 145). Psalm 119 is divided into 22 strophes of eight verses each.
 - 4. Thought Rhyme (Parallelism): The sense is repeated rather than sound (see below).

II. Parallelism

- A. **Definition**: Parallelism is “the repetition of meaning in parallel expressions” (Ross, *BKC*, 1:780).

- B. **Advantages**: Repetition of thought has some benefits.
 - 1. It makes understanding easier since truths or expressions are repeated, in other words. This keeps us from the error of thinking that a different point is being made in the second line.
 - 2. It allows translations “to reproduce its chief effects with very little loss of either force or beauty” (Kidner, 1:4).

- C. **Types** of Parallelism
 - 1. Synonymous: The second line “reinforces the first, so that its content is enriched, and the total effect becomes spacious and impressive” (Kidner, 1:3).

“Then Israel entered Egypt;
Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham” (105:23 Ross translation)

“He does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities” (103:10)
 - 2. Antithetic: The second line provides a contrasting truth to the first line.

“The wicked borrow and do not repay,
but the righteous give generously” (37:21)
 - 3. Emblematic: One of the lines explains the other by metaphorical comparison.

“As a father has compassion on his children,
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him” (103:13)
 - 4. Synthetic: The second line develops the idea of the first (a general category developed by Lowth but broken down here using Ross’ categories).
 - a. Incomplete *with* Compensation: Lines are *equal* in length with only some terms parallel.

“You will destroy their offspring from the earth
and their children from among the sons of men” (21:10 Ross translation)

- b. Climactic: Each line builds upon the previous one with increasing intensity (stair-step parallelism). This is a type of incomplete parallelism with compensation.

“Ascribe to the LORD O holy ones (heavenly beings)
Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength
Ascribe to the LORD the glory due His name
Worship the LORD in the beauty of His holiness” (29:1-2 Maranatha Song!)

- c. Incomplete *without* Compensation: Lines are of *different* lengths with only some terms parallel.

“O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your anger
or discipline me in Your wrath” (6:1)

- d. Formal: The second line is *all* compensation, so it simply continues the thought of the first (so actually, there's no parallelism!).

“I have installed My King
on Zion, my holy hill” (2:6)

Hermeneutics & Figures in Psalms

I. Tips for Interpreting the Psalms

- A. Pay attention to repeating refrains, phrases, or ideas to identify the structure and outline the psalm correctly.
- B. Summarize the message of the psalm in a sentence.
- C. Consider the historical notations in the text and title to discover the historical setting.
- D. Classify the psalm using one of F. Duane Lindsey's categories (class notes, p. 386).
- E. Consider the progress of revelation to correctly interpret incomplete theology (e.g., 51:11, “...do not...take your Holy Spirit from me”).
- F. Reword figures of speech to give their meanings (see next page).
- G. Use New Testament allusions and quotations of the psalm for understanding, but do not read back into the text what the original author and audience would not have understood.

II. Common Figures of Speech in Psalms

A. Figures of Comparison

1. Simile: denotes *resemblance* between two things unlike but yet have something in common (“x is like y”).

“He shall be like a *tree* planted by streams of water” (1:3)

2. Metaphor: denotes *representation* between two things unlike but yet have something in common (“x is y”)

“The LORD God is a *sun* and *shield*” (84:11)

3. Hypocatastasis: denotes *implication* between two things unlike but yet have something in common (“x” alone is stated, but the context implies that “x” is like y)

“*Dogs* have surrounded me” (22:16)

4. Anthropomorphism: God compared to man’s bodily part(s)

“Hide your *face* from my sins” (51:9)

5. Zoomorphism: God compared to animals

“In the shadow of your *wings* I used to rejoice” (63:7)

6. Personification: Inanimate objects are given properties or characteristics of living things

“Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth” (73:9)

B. Figures of Substitution

1. Metonymy: substituting one word for another (the most common figure in Psalms)

“They flatter with their *tongue*” (5:9)

2. Synecdoche: substituting a part for the whole or vice versa

“But you are... my Glorious One, who lifts up my *head*” (3:3)

C. Figures of Addition

1. Parallelism: saying the *same concept* in different words in parallel lines (explained and illustrated in detail on previous pages)

2. Repetition: the exact *same word* or words are used twice or more

“*My God, My God*, why have you forsaken me?” (22:1)

D. Figures of Omission

1. Ellipsis: omission of a word or words in a sentence

“When you make ready [*your arrows*] upon your strings” (21:12)

2. Aposiopesis: sudden silence or breaking off what is being said

“My soul is greatly troubled; but You, O LORD, how long—?” (6:3)

Worship in Israel

Adapted from Allen P. Ross, "The Psalms and Israel's Worship" (Dallas Seminary class handout, 1985)

I. The Nature of Worship (Fourfold)

- A. Aesthetic Sense: Drama, symbolism, and ritual ceremony all appeal to our aesthetic instincts. Jews lived in booths, ate communal offerings, put blood on doorposts, and did other symbolic acts that taught well (a similar methodology is developed in the excellent book, *Let's Make a Memory*, by Shirley Dobson & Gloria Gaither).
- B. Intellectual Sense: Worship must emphasize understanding or knowledge to (1) keep it free from superstition, and (2) enable people to see that ours is a rationally ordered universe.
- C. Moral Sense: Ethical and moral content must be present in ritual through reading/meditation of Scripture and fellowship to inspire truth in living.
- D. Corporate Sense: "Worship is a communal activity. There is a place for personal piety and devotion, but the purpose of such must be the participation in the congregation of the righteous. The results of private meditations will be the sharing in the corporate assembly."

II. The Five Component Features of Worship

- A. Sacrifice and Offering: the way something became holy (things were clean, unclean, or holy) where the external rite expressed an inward disposition (faith) necessary to please God since without sacrifice there was no worship!
 1. Consecration/Voluntary/Dedicatory
 - a. Burnt: the entire animal was burnt to signify God's total acceptance of the sacrifice
 - b. Grain (Meal): recognition that everything the worshipper had belonged to God
 - c. Fellowship (Communal, Peace): shared meal signifying one's blessings were to share
 - d. Drink: wine poured on the ground signifying total dedication (cf. Phil. 2:17)
 2. Cleansing/Obligatory/Expiatory
 - a. Sin: forgiveness for unintentional sin (Num. 15:22) vs. deliberate sin (15:30-36; cf. willful violations of any of the 10 commandments had the death penalty)
 - b. Guilt (Reparation): covered violations that needed restitution to God or man
- B. Reading of the Word: priests were required to read the Torah every service
- C. Prophetic Exhortation: priests also gave expositions of the passage
- D. Prayer: both spontaneous and private and also planned and public
- E. Praise: given to God for who He is (descriptive) or what He has done (declarative)

III. Occasions for Worship

- A. Individual Cultic Activities
 1. Fulfillment of Religious Obligations (e.g., Firstfruits, tithes): Deut. 26
 2. Times of Illness and Disease (e.g., leprosy): Lev. 13-15
 3. Legal Procedures (e.g., temple refuge for manslaughter but involved forfeit of liberty)
 4. Atonement for Sin (e.g., deception, rash oaths, touching unclean things, etc.)
 5. Fulfilling Special Vows/Presenting Special Offerings: 1 Sam. 1:24-28; 2 Sam. 15:7-9
—in rudimentary form this special vow is seen in Gen. 28:18-22
- B. Communal Cultic Activities
 1. Regular Celebrations (e.g., daily offering, new moon, and feasts)
 2. Special Services (e.g., during military conflict, drought, famine, fasts, prayers)