

UNDERSTANDING THE PSALMS

The Psalms are God's inspired worship manual! More than any other part of Scripture, they celebrate the drawing near, both of nations and individuals to the Lord. The Psalms are poetry, often musical, and are filled with imagery, symbols and emotive vocabulary. Ideas are developed through repetition, called parallelism. The fullest understanding for the Psalms appreciates the cultural context in which they were written. Many Psalms share common features such as mood, vocabulary, and life situation. Recognizing these enables the modern reader to use the Psalms in worship, much like the ancient Israelite. No classification can be considered absolute, since many Psalms do not fit neatly into only one category. The following list is provided for your study and profit.

LAMENT PSALMS

These Psalms reflect the heart of the worshipper when God's presence seems hidden. They are cries of anguish, murmurings in the absence of God. They move from a spirit of complaint to thanksgiving and praise in anticipation of God's deliverance.

Individual Lament - 3, 4, 22, 31, 39, 42-3, 57, 71, 77, 120, 139, 142 Community Lament - 12, 44, 79, 80, 85, 90, 94

PENITENTIAL PSALMS

These are special Lament Psalms which record the broken spirit of the worshipper because of sin. These poems confess sin and extol the grace and mercy of God.

6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143

WISDOM PSALMS

These Psalms resemble the wisdom literature and provide instruction, reminders and encouragement to the worshipping community sometimes called Torah Psalms.

1, 19, 34, 36-7, 49, 62, 73, 112, 119, 127-8, 133

TRUST PSALMS

Like Wisdom Psalms, these Psalms portray God as absolutely trustworthy.

1, 16, 23, 27, 62-3, 91, 121, 125, 131

PRAISE PSALMS

DESCRIPTIVE These songs extol the glory and greatness of the Lord as He is revealed in nature and history, especially Israel's history. The theme is, "How majestic is your Name in all the Earth." 8, 29, 33, 36, 47, 66, 100, 103-105, 111, 113, 117, 135, 145-147

DECLARATIVE These Psalms are the prayers of worshippers who have experienced God's gracious actions on their behalf. His rescuing work has caused them to say, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." 18, 30, 32, 34, 40, 65-67, 75, 78, 92, 116, 118, 124, 136, 138

ENTHRONEMENT PSALMS

Jerusalem, Israel and David, the King, occupy an important place in the Psalms. These recognize the covenant, the city, the throne, and the feasts around which the nation centers its life. Some are clearly Messianic, referring to David initially, but ultimately fulfilled in Christ. These are celebration Psalms affirming, "Thine is the Kingdom."

2, 18, 20-1, 24, 45-8, 50, 68, 72, 76, 84, 87, 89, 101, 110, 120-134, 144