

Solid Rock Christian Church Manassas, Virginia

Bible Study - October 20, 2022

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Title: Introduction to The Book of Psalms - Part III

I. Overview

A. This study session will be a continuation of the **Five Major** functions of the Psalms. Additionally, we will also examine the **Five Minor** functions of Psalms.

B. In our previous study, the **Five Major** functions of the psalms were presented, and they are: **Petition**, **thanksgiving**, **praise**, **instruction**, and **profession of trust**.

C. You were also provided the **Five Minor** functions and they are: **repentance**, **remembrance**, **retribution**, **royalty**, and **liturgy**.

D. In a passage expressing **repentance**, special emphasis is placed on the psalmist's confession of sin and his heartfelt plea for forgiveness.

E. In a passage of **remembrance**, the history of God's people and the acts of His "steadfast love" (Hb. Hessed) are recounted.

F. In a passage calling for **retribution**, believers call upon God, the Righteous Judge, to see to it that justice is done in the world for the sake of His name.

G. In a song **of royalty**, praise and prayer are offered for God's appointed king in Zion and his righteous rule on behalf of the Lord's people.

H. Finally, there are **liturgy songs** adopted for use during Israel's public worship services. This is evident, for example, in the amount

of exact repetition which they contain and in reference to specific devotional acts such as a communal procession to the house of worship or the offering of sacrifices.

II. Structure and Style of The Psalms

A. The diversity of structure and style that is manifested among these ten functional categories (i.e., the five major and five minor categories) in the Psalter, makes it necessary to begin any analysis with questions such as:

1. What type of psalm is this overall?
2. Is more than one type combined within it?

B. To be specific: Does a particular psalm seem to carry out one of the primary purposes of petition, thanksgiving, praise, teaching, or profession of faith?

C. Does it at the same time emphasize confessing one's sins, remembering the past deeds of the Lord, worshipping Him in public, appealing to Him for justice on behalf of His people, or appealing to Him for the glory of His chosen king?

D. These functions should be noted where they occur in the text before undertaking a more specific study of a psalm's content, structural organization, and stylistic features.

E. We will now examine the matters of style, that is, the formal manner of composition. The aim is to guide you into a deeper and clearer level of literary excellence displayed by the biblical prayer-songs.

F. Examples will be provided as illustrations to help you

recognize and distinguish the various genres. //Do you remember the definition provided for the term genre?// If not, here it is again.

Definition: Genre (pronounced **Jaan-ruh**). It means "class" or "type," and it refers to a group of oral or written texts that are similar to one another in some recognizable ways, whether with respect to form, context, function, or usage.

III. The Five Major Functions of The Psalms

A. Once again, by way of repetition, the five principal communicative purposes or functions for which the psalms were used by the people of God are **petition**, **thanksgiving**, **praise**, **instruction** (i.e., teaching), and **profession of trust**.

B. They correspond most closely to the five motivations for prayer, that is, to ask God for help, to **thank** Him for something He has done, to **glorify** His great name, to **teach** others about Him, and to **express one's complete confidence in Him**.

C. As you read and work through the descriptions, examples, and exercises, consider how the psalms contribute to your own personal worship and the worship of the believing community of which you are a part.

IV. Petition

A. The largest number of psalms (or major portions of complete psalms) in the Psalter belong to the category of petition.

B. Sometimes called **lament**, petition includes all kinds of prayers to God for help in time of distress or difficulty. The psalmist may be asking God to protect him from danger, to deliver him from his

enemies, or to assist him at a time of serious sickness, physical or spiritual.

C. There are **two main** types of petition psalms:

1. **Individual prayers** - These are psalms in which the speaker is appealing for help for himself. They are the most common.
2. **Communal prayers** - These are psalms in which the entire congregation of believers asks God to help the group as a whole.

D. Intense emotion is often expressed in psalms of petition: despair, anger, sorrow, and/or frustration.

E. There are also many expressions of hope and confidence in the **LORD's** response. In individual petitions the first-person singular pronoun "I/Me/My" are stated; in the communal type "We/Us/Our" is prominent.

F. In these psalms "**you**" refers to God and "**they**" to the psalmist's enemies.

1. A typical petition contains most of the following functional constituents, but not necessarily in the same order.

- a. **Appeal** - A petition normally begins with an initial, general call to God to listen and a plea to help the psalmist in his time of need.

- (1) Along with this opening appeal to hear the prayer, a **vocative** is usually present (i.e., a divine name in a direct address (e.g., "O Lord") as we see in Psalm 17:1.

- b. **Problem** - The opening appeal is often followed by a more specific description of the distress or danger the psalmist or his people are facing., This may be sickness, death, a dangerous enemy, personal weakness (Psalm 6:2), or even some punishment inflicted by Yahweh Himself.
- (1) In the last situation the psalmist may make a bitter complaint or an accusation against God for delaying His help (Ps. 6:3), for "forsaking" the psalmist in the day of trouble, or for allowing the wicked to prosper.
- c. **Request** - Now the psalmist asks more specifically for what he wants God to do for him or his people (Ps. 5:8, 11). This stage is the "prayer proper." (It is sometimes combined with the "problem.")
- (1) In it the psalmist gives one or more of the following reasons why God should hear and help:
- (a) To show his enemies that he is righteous because he trusts in Yahweh and lives according to His will;
 - (b) To strengthen the faith and life of all who trust in God;
 - (c) To frustrate the plans and punish the deeds of all the wicked in the world and thereby silence the insults and blasphemy of his enemies; and
 - (d) To manifest the great power, glory, and mercy of Yahweh.

d. **Defense or Confession** - In this stage the psalmist claims that he or his people are righteous or innocent - that is, not guilty of any specific wrongdoing or evil committed against God or man (Ps. 26:5).

Alternatively, the personal defense may be replaced by a confession in which the psalmist acknowledges his or his people's wickedness and guilt before the Lord, and pleads for divine mercy and forgiveness (Ps. 69:5).

e. **Profession of trust** - Here the psalmist expresses his complete confidence in God, that is, he is trusting in the LORD to deliver him (and his people) from all harm and danger.

(1) He may include an affirmation that God has helped him or the entire nation in the past (ps. 54:4).

(2) The psalmist may be so certain of God's help that he speaks as if he has already received it (Ps. 6:9).

f. **Promise** - The psalmist makes a personal vow that he will always thank God for having saved him and/or that he will bring sacrifices of thanksgiving to the temple (Ps. 7:17).

g. **Praise** - Prayers of petition often close with a final word of praise to the Lord. Sometimes this includes a call to other believers to glorify God too. Specific reasons may be mentioned as to why all people should praise and magnify His name (Ps. 22:25-31).

G. A characteristic and additional feature of the individual petition is the distinct shift in attitude and emotion from strong discouragement and complaint to heartfelt trust and hope somewhere after the middle of the psalm (Stage 5 - Profession).

H. This type of prayer, even though it may be for the most part an expression of deep sorrow, normally includes a promise of personal commitment (i.e., stage 6) and a joyful word of **praise** (stage 7) at its close.

I. In other words, the overall tone of the psalm moves from sadness to gladness, from despair to hope.

Comments:

- 1) This dramatic, often sudden change in perspective and attitude is not quite so evident in the communal or "national" petitions.
- 2) A similar progression is manifested in the Book of Psalms as a whole: petitions are concentrated in the first half, while praises are predominate in the second half of the Psalter.

J. Please note that **not all** of the psalms of petition, especially the communal prayers, include every one of the seven stages. The only element that **must** be present is the **request**.

K. Additionally, some stages may be repeated in other places within the psalm, and the stages may occur in some order other than that already discussed. Many different combinations are possible.

An Example: The following is an Outline of the individual petition of Psalm 54 (KJV) according to the seven stages:

- | | |
|--|-----------------------|
| [1] Save me, O God, by thy name, and judge me by thy strength. | APPEAL (a) |
| [2] Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth. | |
| [3] For strangers are risen up against me, and oppressors seek after my soul: they have not set God before them. Selah | PROBLEM (b) |
| [4] Behold, God is mine helper: the Lord is with them that uphold my soul. | PROFESSION (e) |
| [5] He shall reward evil unto mine enemies: cut them off in thy truth. | REQUEST (c) |
| [6] I will freely sacrifice unto thee: I will praise thy name, O Lord; for it is good. | PROMISE (f) |
| [7] For he hath delivered me out of all trouble: And mine eye hath seen his desire upon mine enemies. | PRAISE (g) |

L. In Psalm 54, only element **d**, "**defense**" is missing; however, it is implied in the "request," because if someone is slandered, he or she must be innocent of any alleged wrongdoing.

M. There is also some overlapping between the "Promise" (f) and the concluding "Praise" (g), which actually gives the reason the psalmist is thanking God. Verse 7 could also be considered a "Profession of trust" (e).

N. The category of petition song-prayers could be divided into a number of subtypes, depending on the nature of the request or problem the psalmist was facing.

O. One such subtype, for example, is composed of "psalms for protection." In these there is a special emphasis on three elements:

- (1) A description of the distress (paralleling the "problem");
- (2) A declaration of trust (paralleling the "profession of trust"), and
- (3) A petition for protection (paralleling the "request").

P. In the third of these stages, an appeal is often included that the psalmist's enemies be punished as they deserve. These three stage can be seen clearly in Psalm 3:1-2, 3-6, and verse 7, with verse 8 acting as a concluding testimony of faith.

Q. Other psalms with a similar concern for personal or corporate protection are Psalm 27, 35, 55, 56, 64, and 143.

My prayer is that I have not been too technical in the information presented in this lesson. My overall objective was and continues to be, to show you the beauty and depth of emotion, trust, and confidence that is contained in the Psalms.

Now, let's apply what we have covered. Please read and study Psalms 13, 17, 71, and 79. Then, for each one, see if you can identify and then list the verses to which each of the seven stages apply. //Use the outline format that I used in the Example for Psalm 54.//

Remember: A given passage may fit more than one stage, and one or another of the stages may **NOT** appear.

Also indicate the verses that express the strongest emotions in each of these psalms.

Thank you for sharing in another Bible Study session.

Jude 3

Pastor Austin