

Psalms Classification

The Form and Content of the Psalms

Many attempts to classify the psalms fail to consistently distinguish between categories related by form and categories related by content. The following charts give each psalm both a preliminary classification “By Form” (e.g., L, IL, CL, IT, CT, H, A) and “By Content” (wisdom, confidence, repentance, imprecation, kingdom, royal coronation, etc.). Asterisks (*) indicate psalms that illustrate the typical elements of the type; plus symbols (+) indicate psalms of mixed types; question marks (?) indicate less-certain classifications. Grayed blocks indicate sub-collections. “Psalms of David” are in red.

Psalm	Classification		Notes
	By Form	By Content	
Book One (1-41)			
* 1	H	Wisdom, Enemy	Psalms 1-2 introduce the entire Psalter; Psalm 2 may introduce Books I-II. Psalm 1 is a hymn to God’s mercy and the blessings of wisdom. Psalm 2 is either an IL for David’s coronation or, a hymn celebrating God as Lord of the Davidic Covenant (cf. 2Sa 7).
* 2	IL? H?	Royal Coronation, Royal Messianic, Enemy	
* 3	IL	Confidence, Enemy	Psalms 3-6 (perhaps Psalm 7) seem to be part of a regular morning and evening prayer liturgy. Psalm 6.8-9 indicate feelings of reassurance.
4	IL	Confidence, Enemy	
* 5	IL	Enemy	
6	IL	Repentance, Enemy	
7	IL	Innocence, Enemy	
* 8	H	Majesty, Creation, Enemy	Prayer for protection/vindication; confidence is rooted in the ability to make declarations of innocence; lesson: verses 10-16. God’s majesty in creation — can also see God’s mercy; the psalm has wisdom and lament elements.
9	IL	Kingdom, Enemy	Psalms 9-10 may have once formed a single literary unit that was an acrostic. The praise in Psalm 9.1-12 serves as a basis of trust.
10	IL	Kingdom, Enemy	
11	IL	Confidence, Enemy	Verses 4-7 are the lesson.
* 12	IL	Enemy	Verse 5 is a reassurance.
13	IL	Enemy	
14	IL	Petition, Wisdom, Enemy	Petition with reassurance; lesson in verses 1-6; almost identical with Psalm 53.
15	IL	Reassurance, Repentance, Wisdom	In verses 2-5 is the lesson learned by confronting his fears regarding approaching the Ark as a sinner.
16	IL	Confidence, Royal Messianic, Enemy?	Verses 8-10 are Messianic (compare Acts 2.25 ff.).
* 17	IL	Innocence, Enemy	Confidence rooted in the declarations of innocence.
* 18	IT	Royal Victory, Enemy	Celebrates a victory in battle; verses 20-36 are lesson learned; cf. 2Sa 22.
19	H+, IL+	Wisdom, Enemy	Mixed: hymn and wisdom lead to IL, need for prayer?
20	IL	Petition, Confidence, Enemy	Verses 1-5 a reassurance; perhaps a liturgy for the king before the battle (cf. Ps. 21, after the battle)
21	IT	Royal Victory, Enemy	Paired with psalm 20 (before the battle); Ps. 21 celebrates victory after the battle; verses 8-12 are a lesson learned.
22	IL	Royal Messianic, Enemy	The praise of verses 22-31 has the form of a thanksgiving.
* 23	IL	Confidence, Royal Messianic, Enemy	Trouble and lament implied by references to enemies in verses 4a, 5a.
24	H	Royal Messianic? Enemy?	Like Psalm 15, may be an entrance liturgy, but more likely a victory psalm of the king.
25	IL, A	Petition, Enemy	An acrostic; verse 22 shows connection to CL.
26	IL	Innocence, Enemy	The declaration of innocence is a ground of confidence.
27	IL	Enemy	Verses 1-6 may have once been separate IL of confidence.
28	IL	Enemy	Verse 6: God’s reassurance
* 29	H	Majesty, Creation, Enthronement? Enemy?	God’s majesty revealed in creation; enthronement psalm?
* 30	IT	Enemy	
		* Good example of type ? Questionable classification + Mixed types "Psalms of David" in red	L Lament IT Individual Thanksgiving H Hymn A Acrostic IL Individual Lament CT Community Thanksgiving CL Community Lament

Psalm	Classification		Notes		
	By Form	By Content			
31	IL+	Enemy	Elements of IT in verses 7-8, 19-24; a lesson learned (wisdom) in verses 19-24.		
32	IT	Wisdom, Enemy?			
* 33	H	Majesty/Mercy, Creation, Enemy?	General hymn that praises both God's majesty and mercy.		
* 34	IT, A	Wisdom, Enemy?	The wisdom in verses 8-22 predominates.		
35	IL	Innocence, Enemy/Imprecation			
36	IL+	Enemy	The wisdom (verses 1-4) and hymn (verses 5-9) support the lament.		
37	H, A	Wisdom, Enemy	God's mercy in providing wisdom over a long lifetime (cf. IL, IT elements)		
* 38	IL	Repentance, Enemy			
* 39	IL	Repentance, Enemy			
40	IL	Royal Messianic, Enemy	IT regarding past is the basis of confidence for the IL.		
* 41	IL	Royal Messianic, Enemy	Verses 1-3 lesson learned; verse 13 forms a concluding doxology to Book I.		
Book Two (42-72)					
* 42	IL	Confidence	Psalms 42-43 may have once formed a single literary unit — with two sections of trust and a final section of lament.		
* 43	IL	Confidence			
44	CL	Against God	The community laments the apparent contrast between God's past and present dealings.		
* 45	H?	Royal Messianic, Royal Wedding	Is this a hymn or a unique form: a wedding song? Verses 2-9 praise the king; verses 10-15, the queen; verses 16-17 address the king again.		
* 46	H	Zion	Hymns of Zion focus on Jerusalem and its need for the "Great King's" protection; they can prophesy of the kingdom. They have similarities with community psalms of confidence. Enthronement psalms also sometimes focus on God's universal rule, but they can also prophesy of the kingdom.		
* 47	H	Enthronement			
* 48	H	Zion			
* 49	H	Wisdom	A wisdom hymn (with elements of lament and confidence).		
50	H, CT?	Covenant, Wisdom	Remembrance and renewal of the covenant — an exhortation (wisdom) in preparation for either a hymn or a thanksgiving (cf. Psalms 81, 95).		
* 51	IL	Repentance	Wisdom, a lesson learned, in verses 14-17.		
52	IL	Enemy	Lament and petition are implied; wisdom elements supply the confidence.		
53	IL	Enemy, Royal Messianic	Elements of wisdom and hymn; Psalm 53 is almost the same as Psalm 14.		
* 54	IL		The vow to praise (verses 6-7) views the deliverance as accomplished (as in an IT).		
55	IL		Verses 20-21 may be a continuation of the petition, giving the supporting reasons.		
* 56	IL		The two refrains express confidence.		
57	IL		The petition is based on concern for God's glory. Psalms 57 + 60 = Psalm 108.		
58	IL	Enemy/Imprecation			
* 59	IL	Enemy/Imprecation			
* 60	CL	Against God, Royal	The community laments God's apparent rejection; vv. 6-8 indicate God's reassurance. Psalms 57 + 60 = Psalm 108.		
* 61	IL	Royal			
62	IL	Confidence			
63	IL	Confidence			
64	IL	Confidence	Begins with petition; ends on high note of confidence.		
65	CT		Thanks for deliverance and blessing; liturgy at harvest time?		
* 66	IT		Three deepening rounds of thanksgiving ending in praise: verses 1-7; 8-12; 13-19; 20. Verses 13-15 indicate a thank offering.		
67	H, IL?	Mercy, Petition	IL? Petition at beginning; this may indicate the trouble.		
68	H	Royal Victory, Royal Messianic?	Mixture of types? Celebrates God's victory over enemies — the basis for deliverance.		
69	IL	Royal Messianic, Enemy/Imprecation	Elements of lament throughout the petitions; compare verse 9 for Messianic reference.		
70	IL		= 40.13-17		
71	IL		Verses 14-24 reflect an extended vow to praise.		
72	IL, H?	Petition, Royal Messianic	Solomon's petition for the Davidic king; a hymn? Does the petition imply immediate trouble? Verses 18-20 form doxology to Books I and II.		
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Psalm	Classification		Notes
	By Form	By Content	
Book Three (73-89)			
73	IL	Reassurance, Wisdom, Enemy	The petition implied in verses 15-17's visit to the temple results in reassurance and a lesson learned (verses 18-27).
* 74	CL	Enemy/Imprecation	Verses 1-3 are an initial cry and summary.
75	CT	Royal Prophecy	Prophecy of deliverance results in thanksgiving; the king speaks in verses 9-10.
* 76	H	Zion	
77	IL	Confidence, Enemy?	
* 78	H	Royal Messianic, Majesty/Mercy, History	Two historical recitals; each show God's grace, Israel's rebellion, and God's discipline. The psalm shows God's faithfulness despite Israel's unfaithfulness, which culminates in the selection of the Davidic king.
* 79	CL	Enemy/Imprecation, Repentance	
* 80	CL	Against God, Enemy	The refrain in verses 3, 7, 19 is a petition.
81	H, CT?	Covenant, Wisdom	CT? Exhortation (wisdom) regarding God's faithfulness shows He is worthy of praise (compare Psalms 50, 95).
82	CL	Enemy	The setting is like a courtroom indictment of the rulers.
83	CL	Enemy/Imprecation	
84	H	Zion	Lament may be present in verse 2, and implied in the petition of verses 8-9.
85	CL	Enemy?	Verses 8-13 is God's reassurance or a lesson learned.
86	IL	Enemy	
87	H	Zion	
* 88	IL	Lament, Enemy?	Verses 10-12 gives reasons behind the implied petition.
89	IL	Royal Messianic? Against God, Enemy	Praise regarding Davidic Covenant (3-4, 19-37) is basis for lament; v. 52 closes Book III.
Book Four (90-106)			
* 90	CL	Repentance, Wisdom, Enemy?	The Psalm of Moses
* 91	IL	Confidence, Wisdom, Enemy	Motto of verse 1, verses 1-13 show the lesson learned; implied petition; verses 14-16 are God's reassurance.
* 92	IT+	Wisdom	Elements of hymn
* 93	H	Enthronement	
94	CL	Confidence, Wisdom, Enemy/Imprecation	Petition implied in verses 16-19 leads to a lesson (verses 8-15) and confidence.
95	H, CT?	Enthronement, Covenant, Wisdom	Collection of enthronement psalms (95-100) — enthronement psalms (cf. 47, 93, 95-99) praise God's sovereignty over all creation or prophesy of the kingdom. Is Psalm 95 a CT? Verses 7b-11 is an exhortation (wisdom) to praise God as King (compare Psalms 50, 81). Psalms 96-97, Psalms 98-99 form pairs — 96 is like 98, 97 is like 99; Psalms 95, 96, 98, 100 may be extended invitations to join in praise. Psalm 100 is not an enthronement psalm, but is a fitting conclusion.
96	H	Enthronement	
* 97	H	Enthronement	
* 98	H	Enthronement	
* 99	H	Enthronement	
100	H		
* 101	IL	Royal, Innocence, Enemy	
102	IL	Repentance, Enemy	Verses 12-22 express confidence in God's care and a vow (18-22) that future generations will praise Him.
* 103	H	Mercy, Wisdom	Reasons why God should be praised are summarized in verses 1-5; wisdom elements in verses 6-18.
* 104	H	Majesty/Creation	God's majesty shown through His work of creation.
* 105	H	Majesty/History	God's majesty shown through control of Israel's history.
106	CL, H?	Repentance, Enemy? Majesty/History	CL, or, hymn to God's love; verse 48: doxology to Book IV.
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Psalm	Classification		Notes
	By Form	By Content	
Book Five (107-150)			
* 107	CT		CT in five rounds: verses 1-7; 8-14; 15-20; 21-30; 31-42 — verse 43 a conclusion.
108	CL		Hymn is the basis of confidence; verses 7-9 are reassurance. Psalm 57 + 60 = Psa 108
* 109	IL	Enemy, Royal Messianic, Imprecation	Two rounds: 1 st round focuses on external trouble; 2 nd round focuses on internal feelings.
110	H?	Royal Messianic, Royal Coronation, Liturgy	Wisdom hymn or unique form (cf. Psalm 2): liturgy for the coronation of the Davidic king?
111	H, A	Wisdom	An acrostic; a wisdom saying in verse 10
112	H, A	Wisdom	An acrostic; God is praised for provision of wisdom.
113	H		Hallel Psalms (113-118) — songs used to celebrate the Passover and Sabbath
114	H	History	
115	CL	Confidence, Liturgy	Liturgy; a psalm of confidence with a call to confidence
* 116	IT	Royal Messianic	
* 117	H		
118	IT	Royal Messianic, Royal Victory, Entrance Liturgy	Psalm of victory in battle; verses 15-16 God's dramatic entry; verses 19-20 entrance liturgy
119	H+A	Wisdom	Hymn praising God's mercy via His Word (elements of lament and thanksgiving); an acrostic.
120	IL		Psalms of Ascent (120-134) — songs used for the pilgrimage to Jerusalem
* 121	IL	Confidence, Liturgy	Liturgical elements
* 122	H	Zion Pilgrimage	Typical Zion pilgrimage psalm
* 123	CL	Confidence	
* 124	CT		
125	CL	Confidence	
* 126	CL	Confidence	
127	H	Wisdom	The calls to praise are assumed — the wisdom elements in each form the exhortations to praise God.
128	H	Wisdom	
129	CL	Confidence, Royal Messianic, Imprecation	Lament, confidence, and praise in verses 1-4 moves to imprecation in verses 5-8.
* 130	IL	Repentance	
131	IL	Confidence	
132	IL	Royal Messianic, Liturgy, Petition, Reassurance	Davidic Covenant; the king's petitions in verses 1-5, 6-9, 10 parallel God's reassurance in verses 11-12, 13-16, 17-18.
133	H	Zion, Wisdom	
134	H	Liturgy?	A closing to the Psalms of Ascent: 120-134
* 135	H	Majesty/Mercy	God praised as majestic, 6-12, and merciful, 13-14
136	H	Majesty/Mercy	God praised as majestic, 4-22, and merciful, 23-25; antiphonal
* 137	CL	Imprecation	
138	IL, +IT	Confidence	IT is part of confidence; a vow to thank God when delivered.
* 139	IL	Innocence	Hymn is basis of innocence.
* 140	IL		
141	IL		
142	IL	Enemy	
143	IL	Repentance, Imprecation	
144	IL	Royal Lament	Petition of king for victory in battle; cf. elements in Psalm 18 (an IT).
* 145	H, A		Concluding collection of hymns (145-150) Psalm 145: four rounds of call and praise (w. last inverted) or one extended call to praise; an acrostic.
* 146	H		
* 147	H		Hymn in three rounds of call and praise: 1, 2-6; 7, 8-11; 12, 13-20; verse 21 a final call.
* 148	H	Majesty, Creation	Hymn in two rounds of call and praise: 1-4, 5-6; 7-12, 13-14a; verse 14b a final call. Or, one extended call to praise.
* 149	H	God's Victory, Royal Victory?	
* 150	H	Doxology	Or, one extended call to praise; the closing doxology for Book V and the entire Psalter.
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