

The Movement and Message of the Psalter: A Compositional Approach

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Class One: A Glimpse Back, A Vision Forward

READ SYLLABUS.

INITIAL QUESTIONS:

- What are some of the ways that you have been taught to read or have on your own began to read the Psalms?
- How do you think Jesus fits into the Psalms?
- The most common ways normal, everyday Christians read the Psalter
 - o Devotionally
 - o Christologically – Christ speaking, Christ a character, Christ the subject

[TIME CHECK: 6:40]

RECENT TRENDS IN PSALM STUDY

Form-Genre Criticism

- This study was pioneered by the work of Hermann Gunkel in the early 1900s, and by Mowinckel, one of his students, in the 40s and 50s
- This kind of study is primarily about trying to organize the psalms according to their literary types or genres in relation to their life situation (*Sitz im Leben*)
 - o Gunkel thought the psalms were mainly from post-exilic times, and saw their life situation as bound up in the historical events from that time period
 - o Mowinckel thought the psalms were from pre-exilic times, saw their life situation as bound up in the temple activities, especially enthronement ceremonies and seasonal festivals
- The problem is that most of the *Sitz im Leben* thought up by this criticism are completely made up – they have no historical basis and are purely speculation

Canonical-Compositional Criticism

- This study was pioneered in the 1970s by the work of Brevard Childs, and was first seriously applied to the Psalter in the 1980s beginning with Gerald Wilson
- Rather than re-organizing the Psalter according to literary genres, and then interpreting them based on their speculative *Sitz im Leben*, this approach looks at the book of Psalms as an finally-edited, purposefully-arranged Book, which has come down to us in One Shape throughout history
- Our goal, then, is to try and understand that book just as it is, look for literary clues and editorial activity as clues to the author's intention
- Regardless of how each psalm might have been used prior to its inclusion in the Psalter, the psalms stand now in relation to one another from within the context of 1) the Psalter, 2) the OT, and 3) the entire Bible.
- If form criticism looked at the life situation (*Sitz im Leben*), this approach looks the textual situation (*Sitz im Text*)

FOUR GUIDELINES FOR READING THE PSALTER ----- SEE THE SLIDES

[TIME CHECK: 6:55]

INTRODUCTORY ISSUES

What book are we reading?

- The secondary nature of book titles
- "Psalms" from *mizmor* → *psalmos*, meaning "poem accompanied with music"
 - o Name suggests a book of worship songs, hymnbook of 2nd Temple
- "Praises" from *tehillim*, the name of it in Hebrew circles
 - o Title is from Psalm 145 and content of 146-150, related to Hallelujah
 - o It is also the title as early as the Dead Sea Scrolls (pre-Jesus)
 - o Name suggests the praise of God in any context, give us the words of praise appropriate of God's praise --- an instruction book of praise
- "David" was a title in the NT and in Josephus ---- from 73 pss titles
- "Psalter" – also from *mizmor*, but refers to a collection of psalms, rather than alone
- "O the blessings of the man" – a medieval Jewish name for the book, from Psalm 1.1
 - o Probably the best name
 - o Raises two questions
 - What is blessing and how do we get it?
 - Who is this Man, and what does blessing have to do with him?

What is a Psalm?

- The Formal poetry of ancient Israel
 - o Many different shapes and sizes and ancient genres
 - o Seemed to have different function for the ancient communities
 - Not all psalms are technically “psalms” – some are instructions, songs, etc.
- There are many psalm-like poems throughout the Bible
 - o Exodus 15 – praise of the people after the Red Sea
 - o 1 Samuel 2 – the prophetic prayer of Hannah after giving birth to Samuel
 - o Jonah 2 – a distressed prayer of Jonah from the great fish
 - o Habakkuk 3 – prophetic vision of the future epic battle b/w God and the nations
 - o Luke 1-2 – prophetic prayers from Mary and Zechariah about Jesus and John
- The psalms in the Psalter fit into this same stream of poetry from the Bible
- Two downloads for further study
 - o Psalm terminology
 - o The basics of Hebrew poetry – Tremper Longman

WHO WROTE THE PSALMS?

- David
 - o Attributed with 73 psalms in the Psalter
 - o 2 Sam 6.5; 1 Chron 15.16ff --- David associated with making music before Yhwh and the Ark, bringing it to Jerusalem
 - o 1 Chronicles 25.1 --- David connected with the organization of worship in Jerusalem
 - o Amos 6:5 --- David was an inventor of instruments
 - o 2 Sam 23.1 --- identifies David as a prophet
 - o “There are fascinating antecedents for David’s status as a prophet in the literature of late Second Temple Judaism and that the basis for this is, in large measure, his perceived role as psalmist.” (Margaret Daly-Denton)
- David appointed the Sons of Korah, Asaph, and Heman and Ethan for music
 - o 1 Chronicles 6:31 --- Levites put in charge of the service of song in the house of the Lord after the Ark rested there, first in the tent of meeting, then in the temple
 - o 1 Chronicles 15.16-28 --- appointed them for worship in transporting the Ark, with singing and bronze cymbals (v17-19)
 - o 1 Chronicles 25.1-9 --- the appointment for worship – Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun (Ethan) were appointed *to prophesy* with lyres, harps, and cymbals.
 - Fourteen of the sons of Korah are also appointed as musicians here

- The Sons of Korah
 - Attributed with 12 psalms in the Psalter
 - Korah led a rebellion in the time of Moses (Num 16; 26.11 --- not all died)
 - They were part of David’s mighty men (1 Chron 12.6) to help against Saul
 - They were keepers of the Temple gates in post-exilic Israel (1 Chron 9.17; Neh 11.19)
 - David appointed them as door-keepers of the tent of meeting (1 Chr 26.1ff)
 - They were also musicians in the sanctuary (Heman was one)
 - Fourteen of the sons were appointed as musicians by David (1 Chr 25)
 - They were renowned as singers/musicians in Jehoshaphat’s time (2 Chr 20.19)
- Asaph
 - Attributed with 12 psalms in the Psalter
 - 1 Chronicles 6:39 --- Asaph is a “brother” (tribe-brother) of Heman and Ethan
 - 1 Chronicles 15.17-19 --- put in charge on bronze cymbals in worship before Ark
 - 1 Chronicles 16.5-7 --- the chief leader of worship before the Ark (to invoke, thank, and praise Yhwh, the God of Israel)
 - The song of thanks at this point (v8-36) is a combo of Ps 105, 96, and 106
 - 2 Chronicles 29.30 --- consider a “seer” and a renowned psalm writer with David
 - This goes along with his prophetic role in 1 Chr 25.1, where they “prophesied under the direction of the king” (v2)
 - According to Delitzsch, his psalms are set apart from the Korahites by their “prophetically judicial character” (358)
 - Mentioned throughout Israel’s history (2 Chron 20.14; 29.13; Ezra 2.41, 3.10; Neh 7.44, 11.22)
 - Nehemiah 12.46 --- post-exile considered side-by-side with David
- The Ezrahites, Heman and Ethan (Jeduthun?): 1 psalm each
 - Heman
 - A son of the Korahites, and a singer (1 Chr 6.33)
 - In charge of bronze cymbals with Asaph (1 Chr 15.19)
 - He could be the same Heman who was a sage in Solomon’s time (1 Kgs 4.31), but scholars are debated about it --- he must be according to Scripture
 - Considered a prophet (2 Chr 25.1), where him and his sons were in charge of “music in the house of God” (v4-6)
 - Ethan (Jeduthun)
 - A son of Merari (1 Chr 6.44)
 - Helped with cymbals (1 Chr 15.19)
 - Considered a prophet (1 Chr 25.1), where him and his sons prophesied with lyre in thanksgiving and praise (v3)
 - As with Heman, scholars debate whether David’s Ethan (Jeduthun) is the same person as Solomon’s Ethan (1 Kgs 4.31)

- Solomon: 2 psalms
 - o Continued the musical tradition began by David (2 Chr 7.6)
 - o Known more for his wisdom than his musical abilities, which had led some scholars to doubt whether the superscription is “by Solomon” or “for Solomon”
 - o Several other books have clear correlations with Solomon: Proverbs, Song of Solomon, and Ecclesiastes ---- all of which are poetic in nature
- Moses: 1 psalm
 - o The first psalm-writer in Israel, included several poems in the Pentateuch
 - o Was surely a prophet in Israel (Dt 18.15 and 34.10)

WHEN WERE THE PSALMS WRITTEN? ----- SEE SLIDES

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[TIME CHECK: 7:15]

POETRY AND THEOLOGY, MUSIC AND PROPHECY

- When the NT reads the Psalms, they do not read them as a hymnbook of ancient Israel
 - o They treat they Psalms as teaching us the highest of theology – Christology
 - o Poetry in the OT is commonly used to express this kind of theology
 - QUOTES ON PPT

How did this connection come about?

- The word for “to prophesy” is the same word used in Chronicles for the singing and playing of instruments in the service of the house of God
- Like the prophets, the psalmists also receive prophetic oracles (81.8ff)
- The idea of a “new song” (33.3; 40.4; 96.1; 144.9; 149.1)
 - o This does not refer to an original composition, but refers to the song of the New Age which will come about with the new covenant in the last days
 - o “the Song of the New Exodus” or “the Canticle of the Future Age”
 - o It binds the themes of divine glory to that of the universal role of the God-king or his Anointed One in the re-creation of the world (33.3, 14ff; 144.9ff)
 - o This correlates well with the New Song in Revelation 5.9-10 and 14.3

- The connection of poetry and theology is intimately connected with music and prophecy
 - o 1 Chronicles 25.1ff cannot make this anymore clear
 - o 1 Samuel 10:5-6 – Saul is made a prophet with musical prophets
 - o 1 Samuel 16.23 – David arrives at Saul’s court an eloquent and skilled musician/warrior
 - o 2 Samuel 22-23 – David is called a prophet and writes his last psalm, his words are clearly for the future (22.51)
 - o 2 Kings 3.15 – Elisha needed music to help him prophesy
- Ancient examples
 - o Exodus 15 --- a prophetic song about Joshua’s time, taught to the people
 - o Deuteronomy 31:28ff --- a prophetic song about the future exile and rebellion
 - o Isaiah 5 --- a love song for the vineyard which is prophesy for the future

What do we take away?

- The Psalter was not meant to be a manual of instruction on how to pray or praise God, but primarily served as a prophetic vision forward
- MUSIC WAS NOT ENTERTAINMENT, BUT HAD A FUNCTION – PROPHECY

FINAL QUOTE

“The book of Psalms as a whole...has a plot structure and a central theme, which are focused on the prophetic hope of the coming Messiah. When the music stops and the speaking begins, we hear the theme of the Davidic covenant. The narrator, as it were, is reminding the reader of what the book of Psalms is all about --- the coming Messiah.” (Sailhamer, *Biblical Prophecy*, 63)