

Sepher Tehillim

Psalms part 2

History of Interpretation

- The study of the Psalms in the second half of the 20th century was deeply influenced by the work of 2 prominent scholars.
 - Sigmund Mowinckel
 - Hermann Gunkel
- Both of these scholars most significant works were not translated into English until after 1950



Sigmund Mowinckel

- Sigmund Mowinckel
 - Educated at the University of Oslo, Mowinckel spent his life from 1917 teaching there.
 - *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* was first published in Norwegian in 1951, then revised (by the author) and translated into English in 1962, and represents the mature statement of his views.
- Mowinckel stressed the original place of the psalms in worship at the Temple in Jerusalem.
 - He argues that the different kinds of psalms, whether hymns of praise or prayers of lament, make sense as parts of Temple worship
 - He used the term *Sitz im Leben* to describe the historic setting of the different psalm genres.
- He notes that few psalms are specific about the particular cause of the thanksgiving or distress.
 - He suggests this is because they were composed for use by different people on various occasions;

The Psalms in Israel's Worship

- “But in the psalms the human heart has found its own counterpart at all times, in sorrow and in happiness, as an individual and as a member of God's People.” [p. 1]
 - The appeal of the psalms is almost universal
 - This has led to the psalms being studied more often than other forms of biblical literature

The Psalms in Israel's Worship

- One of the things that made Mowinckel's approach so refreshing after the skepticism of the 19th century, was the assumption of historicity...
 - “Who are the men who are here pouring out their hearts and in whose words we are still doing the same? When did they live, under what conditions did they strive and suffer, sorrow and rejoice?” [p.1]
- However the assumption of historicity does not necessarily assume the inspiration of the psalms or their revelatory character

The Psalms in Israel's Worship

- “We must therefore try to understand them historically, on the basis of their own times. But this also means that we must try to find their place and function in the religious life of ancient Israel, or in early Judaism,”
- “It is against this background of the historical and religio-phenomenological understanding that the real and lasting qualities of the psalms will appear”

The Psalms in Israel's Worship

- Mowinckel understands the contribution of form criticism
- He regards it as a tool to move closer to the “Sitz im Leben”
 - “Essential parts of the content lie concealed in the form elements. Each motif or theme must be followed up in the different psalms and its quality be determined by comparison.” [p 25]

Hermann Gunkel

- Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932) was a German Protestant Old Testament scholar.
 - Gunkel was the a son of a Lutheran pastor. He studied theology in Göttingen and Hanover.
 - Gunkel had become an outstanding representative of the "History of Religion School" (die religionsgeschichtliche Schule). This was a circle of scholars from Göttingen, who shared assumptions regarding the analysis of the development of religion.
 - He is sometimes called the father of form criticism and of tradition history, critical methodologies that his work had helped develop.

Gunkel and the Gattungen

- “Genre research in Psalms is nonnegotiable, not something one can execute or ignore according to preference. Rather it is the foundational work with which there can be no certainty in the remainder. It is the firm ground from which everything else must ascend.”
 - Gunkel minimized the historic settings
 - His primary emphasis is the genre
 - His categories are the starting point for most Psalmic research

Criteria of a Gattung

- According to Gunkel, for psalms to be considered as part of the same genre (*Gattung*) three conditions had to be met:
 - the psalms had to have a similar setting in life (*Sitz im Leben*), basis in worship, a common cultic setting, or at least originally derive from one;
 - they had to be characterized by common thoughts, feelings, and moods; and
 - they required a shared diction, style, and structure
 - a language related to form (*Formensprache*). This feature provides the signals of the particular genre.

The Gattungen

- Working with these criteria, Gunkel isolated a number of different gattungen, the genres or types of psalms.
 - **hymns,**
 - enthronement psalms,
 - **communal laments,**
 - royal psalms,
 - **individual complaints,**
 - **individual thanksgiving psalms**

The Hymns

- The form critical school typically divides the Hymns into 3 sub-categories
 - General Hymns
 - Songs of Zion
 - Enthronement Hymns

General Hymns

- ***Form***

- Introduction: A call to praise, sing, and rejoice to Yahweh in some form.
- Body: The reasons why Yahweh should be praised (often introduced by כִּי, kî, “for”).
 - His qualities and attributes.
 - His regular or repeated actions, including his works in creation and conservation of cosmos and his works in history, especially for Israel.
- Conclusion: renewed summons to praise.

- ***Sitz im Leben***

- Hymns were sung as part of worship on diverse occasions, including sacred festivals as well at other times, perhaps by a choir or an individual singer.

Songs of Zion

- Characteristics:
 - These psalms tend to lack a proper introduction.
 - They praise Yahweh by praising Jerusalem, addressing the holy place, and calling down blessings upon it.
 - They were sung at particular occasions that celebrated Jerusalem's majesty and future eschatological significance.

Hymns of Yahweh's Enthronement

- **Form**

- Often begin with the words יהוה מלך,
 - “Yahweh has become king.”
 - I prefer “Yahweh reigns”
- Contain many calls to rejoice.
 - Have brief references to Yahweh's deeds, depicted as just now taking place.
 - Give descriptions of what his reign will mean to Israel and the world.
- Present the idea that a new world kingdom is coming.

- **Sitz im Leben**

- These psalms were used as part of Israel's worship, likely including an enthronement festival in which Yahweh is glorified as king. [??]
- These psalms were given a prophetic, eschatological, reinterpretation in their final stages.

The Laments

- The Laments or Complaints are based on the trouble or misfortune of the nation or of an individual.
 - Are largely “political”
 - Seek God’s intervention
 - Often base the petition on God’s honor
- Individual Laments break into a number of sub-categories

Communal Complaint Psalms

- ***Form***

- Calling upon Yahweh by name (usually in the vocative)
- Lamenting complaints over the misfortune; almost always political in nature.
 - Supplications and petitions to Yahweh to transform the misfortunes.
- Thoughts aimed to excite confidence in the suppliant or to move Yahweh to action, such as his honour or the sake of his name.
 - Often end with a certainty of hearing.

- ***Sitz im Leben***

- The setting of these psalms are days of national fasting and/or complaint festivals brought on by various national calamities, such as war, exile, pestilence, drought, famine, and plagues.

Individual Laments in General

- **Form**
 - Laments will typically include the following element,
 - Summons to Yahweh.
 - Complaint/Lament proper,
 - Considerations inducing Yahweh to intervene,
 - Petition/Entreaty. This is the most significant part of the complaint psalm.
 - Conviction of being heard (present only in some Psalms) and/or a vow.
 - ***Sitz im Leben***
 - The setting in life is difficult to determine due to the formulaic character of the language in laments.
 - Originally derives from the worship service
 - These psalms were occasioned by apparently life-threatening situations

Mixed Types of Individual Laments

- **Psalms Protesting Innocence**
 - Psalms 5; 7; 17; 26.
- **Psalms of Confession**
 - Psalms 51; 130
- **Psalms of Cursing and Vengeance**
 - Psalm 109, among others..
- **Psalms of Trust**
 - Psalms 4; 11; 16; 23; 27:1-6; 62; 131

Royal Psalms

- ***Form***
 - Formally Royal psalms are of different types,
 - Praises of the king.
 - Affirmations of Yahweh's favour to the king.
 - Prayers for the king (or his own prayer) and royal oracles.
 - Portrayals of the king's righteousness and piety.
- ***Sitz im Leben***
 - These psalms were performed at court
 - Specific occasions may be
 - enthronement/accession and anniversaries,
 - victory over an enemy,
 - healing from an illness,.

Thanksgiving Psalms

- **Thanksgivings of the Individual**

- ***Form***

- An expanded Introduction, declaring the intention to thank God.
 - Narration of the trouble, The psalmist usually recounts:
 - his trouble (thus they are akin to Laments)
 - his calling upon God
 - his deliverance
 - Acknowledgement/proclamation of Yahweh's deliverance;
 - In many cases, the psalm ends with an Announcement of the thank-offering.

- ***Sitz im Leben***

Since the word usually translated “thanksgiving” is the same word used for “thank offering” it is clear that these psalms were intended to be used in a cultic setting.

Thanksgiving Psalms

- **Thanksgivings of the Community**
 - These psalms are parallel in form to the individual thanksgiving psalms.
 - The life setting for these psalms was likely a cultic celebration at the temple in remembrance of God's help and intervention.

Wisdom Psalms

- While there are wisdom elements found in psalms of a variety of genres, there are psalms which exhibit a concentration of wisdom themes to be considered a distinct type.
- As such, these psalms do not exhibit a single formal pattern, but share a number of characteristics, including:
 - Psalmist speaks of his words as wisdom, instruction, etc.
 - He describes the “fear of Yahweh.”
 - He addresses his hearers as “sons.”
 - He warns, teaches, and uses figures, question and answer techniques, beatitudes, descriptions of Yahweh’s ways.

Smaller Genres and Mixed Types

- **Pilgrimage Psalms**
 - Only one complete example remains, Psalm 122.
 - These psalms were used at the beginning of a pilgrimage as well as once the pilgrim had reached his or her destination.
- **Psalms Using Ancient Stories (Legends) of Israel**
 - The Narration of Yahweh's deeds and/or the sins of Israel (*Heilsgeschichte*)
 - Exhortation
- **Psalm Liturgies**
 - These psalms are characterized by their antiphonal structure, particularly suited for corporate worship.
- **Miscellaneous**
 - Psalms 36; 50; 52; 75; 82; 108.
- **Mixed Psalms**
 - Psalms 9-10; 12; 77; 90; 94; 119; 123; 137.

- Blessed *is* the man
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners,
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;

But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and night.

He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water,
That brings forth its fruit in its season,
Whose leaf also shall not wither;
And whatever he does shall prosper.

The ungodly *are* not so,
But *are* like the chaff which the wind drives away.
Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment,
Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
But the way of the ungodly shall perish.

A Hymn

- Psalm 8 is an example of the “general hymn” type

- To the Chief Musician. On the instrument of Gath. Psalm of David.
O LORD, our Lord,
How excellent *is* Your name in all the earth,
Who have set Your glory above the heavens!

Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants
You have ordained strength,
Because of Your enemies,
That You may silence the enemy and the avenger.

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained,

What is man that You are mindful of him,
And the son of man that You visit him?
For You have made him a little lower than the angels,
And You have crowned him with glory and honor.
You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands;
You have put all *things* under his feet,
All sheep and oxen –
Even the beasts of the field,
The birds of the air,
And the fish of the sea
That pass through the paths of the seas.

O LORD, our Lord,
How excellent *is* Your name in all the earth!

A Song of Zion

- **Psalm 122** A Song of Ascents. Of David.

I was glad when they said to me,
"Let us go into the house of the LORD."
Our feet have been standing Within your gates, O Jerusalem!

Jerusalem is built As a city that is compact together,
Where the tribes go up,
The tribes of the LORD,
To the Testimony of Israel,
To give thanks to the name of the LORD.

For thrones are set there for judgment,
The thrones of the house of David.
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
May they prosper who love you.
Peace be within your walls,
Prosperity within your palaces.

For the sake of my brethren and companions,
I will now say, "Peace *be* within you."
Because of the house of the LORD our God
I will seek your good.

יהוה מלך

- **Psalm 93:1-5**

The LORD reigns,
He is clothed with majesty;
The LORD is clothed,
He has girded Himself with strength.

Surely the world is established, so that it cannot be moved.
Your throne *is* established from of old;
You *are* from everlasting.

The floods have lifted up, O LORD,
The floods have lifted up their voice;
The floods lift up their waves.

The LORD on high *is* mightier
Than the noise of many waters,
Than the mighty waves of the sea.

Your testimonies are very sure;
Holiness adorns Your house,
O LORD, forever.

יהוה מלך

- **Psalm 93:1-5**

The LORD reigns,
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The LORD is clothed,
He has girded Himself with strength.

Surely the world is established, so that it cannot be moved.
Your throne *is* established from of old;
You *are* from everlasting.

The floods have lifted up, O LORD,
The floods have lifted up their voice;
The floods lift up their waves.
Mightier than the noise of many waters,
Than the mighty waves of the sea.
YHWH is Mightier than “Marom”

Your congregation is established from of old
holiness adorns Your house,
You O LORD *abide* forever

As Bold As I Get

- **Psalm 93:4 - 5**

מקלות מים רבים
אדירים משברי־ים
אדיר במרום יהוה

עדתיך נאמנו מאז
לבי־תך נאוה־קדש
יהוה לארך ימים

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לבי־תך נאוה־קדש
יהוה לארך ימים

A Lament of the Community

- Psalm 83

Do not keep silent, O God!

Do not hold Your peace,
And do not be still, O God!

For behold, Your enemies make a tumult;

And those who hate You have lifted up their head.

They have taken crafty counsel against Your people,

And consulted together against Your sheltered ones.

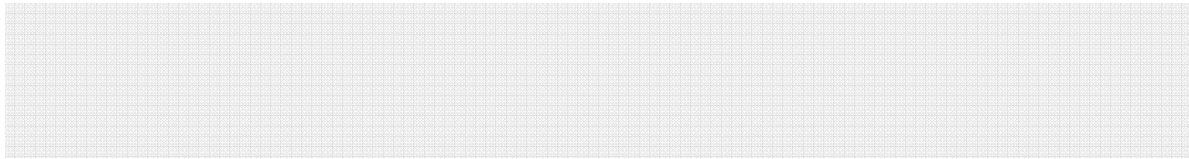
They have said,

"Come, and let us cut them off from *being* a nation,

That the name of Israel may be remembered no more."

For they have consulted together with one consent;
They form a confederacy against You:
The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites;
Moab and the Hagarites;
Geba, Ammon, and Amalek;
Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre;
Assyria also has joined with them;
They have helped the children of Lot.

Selah



Deal with them as *with* Midian,
As *with* Sisera,
As *with* Jabin at the Brook Kishon,
Who perished at En Dor,
Who became *as* refuse on the earth.
Make their nobles like Oreb and like Zeeb,
Yes, all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna,
Who said, "Let us take for ourselves
The pastures of God for a possession."

O my God, make them like the whirling dust,
Like the chaff before the wind!
As the fire burns the woods,
And as the flame sets the mountains on fire,

So pursue them with Your tempest,
And frighten them with Your storm.
Fill their faces with shame,
That they may seek Your name, O LORD.
Let them be confounded and dismayed forever;
Yes, let them be put to shame and perish,

That they may know that You,
whose name alone *is* the LORD,
Are the Most High over all the earth.

A Themed Group

- Psalms 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15 are all relatively short psalms.
- They are loosely tied together with a theme of divine justice.
 - They begin with a statement of the trouble contrasted with God's character, setting the theme for the group.
 - They next appeal for help because the righteous are declining
 - They asks how long injustice will endure, and moves to a hopeful affirmation of faith
 - They denounce the folly of wickedness and move to the character of those who follow Jehovah

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

In the LORD I put my trust;

How can you say to my soul,

"Flee *as* a bird to your mountain"?

For look! The wicked bend *their* bow,

They make ready their arrow on the string,

That they may shoot secretly at the upright in heart.

If the foundations are destroyed,

What can the righteous do?

The LORD *is* in His holy temple,

The LORD's throne *is* in heaven;

His eyes behold,

His eyelids test the sons of men.

The LORD tests the righteous,

But the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates.

Upon the wicked He will rain coals;

Fire and brimstone and a burning wind *Shall be* the
portion of their cup.

For the LORD *is* righteous,

He loves righteousness;

His countenance beholds the upright.

To the Chief Musician. On an eight-stringed harp. A Psalm of David.

Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases!

For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men.

They speak idly everyone with his neighbor;

With flattering lips *and* a double heart they speak.

May the LORD cut off all flattering lips,

And the tongue that speaks proud things,

Who have said,

"With our tongue we will prevail;

Our lips *are* our own;

Who *is* lord over us?"

"For the oppression of the poor,

for the sighing of the needy,

Now I will arise," says the LORD;

"I will set *him* in the safety for which he yearns."

The words of the LORD *are* pure words,

Like silver tried in a furnace of earth,

Purified seven times. You shall keep them,

O LORD, You shall preserve them from this generation forever.

The wicked prowl on every side,

When vileness is exalted among the sons of men.

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

How long, O LORD?

Will You forget me forever?

How long will You hide Your face from me?

How long shall I take counsel in my soul,

Having sorrow in my heart daily?

How long will my enemy be exalted over me?

Consider *and* hear me, O LORD my God;

Enlighten my eyes,

Lest I sleep the *sleep of* death;

Lest my enemy say,

"I have prevailed against him";

Lest those who trouble me rejoice when I am moved.

But I have trusted in Your mercy;

My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation.

I will sing to the LORD,

Because He has dealt bountifully with me.

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

The fool has said in his heart,

"There is no God."

They are corrupt,

They have done abominable works,

There is none who does good.

The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men,

To see if there are any who understand,
who seek God.

They have all turned aside,

They have together become corrupt;

There is none who does good,

No, not one.

Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge,

Who eat up my people *as they eat bread,*

And do not call on the LORD?

There they are in great fear,

For God *is* with the generation of the righteous.

You shame the counsel of the poor,

But the LORD *is* his refuge.

Oh, that the salvation of Israel *would come* out of Zion!

When the LORD brings back the captivity of His people,

Let Jacob rejoice *and* Israel be glad.

A Psalm of David.

LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle?
Who may dwell in Your holy hill?

He who walks uprightly,
And works righteousness,
And speaks the truth in his heart;

He *who* does not backbite with his tongue,
Nor does evil to his neighbor,
Nor does he take up a reproach against his friend;
In whose eyes a vile person is despised,
But he honors those who fear the LORD;

He *who* swears to his own hurt and does not change;
He *who* does not put out his money at usury,
Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent.
He who does these *things* shall never be moved.