

A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF THE ROYAL PSALMS

A PAPER PRESENTED TO

THE COUNCIL OF DISPENSATIONAL HERMENEUTICS

BY

BRUCE A. BAKER

CLARKS SUMMIT, PA

SEPTEMBER 22, 2010

Copyright © 2009 by Bruce A. Baker

All rights reserved

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEFINITION AND METHODOLOGY1

 Definition.....1

 Methodology4

INVESTIGATION9

 Psalm 29

 Psalm 1810

 Psalm 2011

 Psalm 2113

 Psalm 4514

 Psalm 7219

 Psalm 8920

 Psalm 10123

 Psalm 11024

 Psalm 13231

 Psalm 14432

 Evaluating Gunkel’s list34

THEOLOGICAL AND PRACTICAL INFERENCES.....35

 The Nature of the World’s Governments35

 The Perpetuity of the Davidic Covenant.....36

 The Re-establishment of the Kingdom.....36

 The Nature of the Ultimate King37

CONCLUSION37

BIBLIOGRAPHY39

DEFINITION AND METHODOLOGY

Definition

The *crux interpretum* of a biblical theology¹ of the royal psalms is the problem of definition. Is there such a thing as a royal psalm, and if so, what are its characteristics? Hasel is quite correct when he notes that

there is inevitably a subjective element in all historical research worthy of the name. ... The historian will always be guided in his work by a principle of selection, which is certainly a subjective enterprise, and by a goal which gives perspective to his work, a goal that is equally subjective.”²

This subjectivity is readily seen in such works as Westermann’s *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*.³ By limiting himself to these two categories, he gives only a cursory nod to the royal psalms, noting (without evidence) that they are concerned with the “‘re-presentation’ of history.”⁴ The German words translated “re-presentation” express the ideas of “presenting to the mind” and of “actualizing or making relevant to the present.”⁵ Thus, there is no room for prophetic revelation about the Messianic King in this schema. Westermann’s principle of selection and

¹ While this paper will be more concerned about finding a definition for the term “royal psalm,” it is also necessary to state what one means by “biblical theology” since this phrase has been used in a myriad of mutually exclusive ways. See John Murray, “Systematic Theology—II,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, 26 (November 1963) for an overview of the variety of understandings concerning biblical theology.

This paper will follow Merrill’s definition of biblical theology. He observed that biblical theology “is concerned to discern, trace, and describe the progress of divine revelation throughout the canon from its earliest to its latest expression.” Eugene H. Merrill, *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 2. Thus the royal psalms will be treated as portion of God’s progressive revelation concerning the king and the kingdom.

² Gerhard F. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology : Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 48.

³ Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 245.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 214, trans note.

pre-understanding of the nature of the royal psalms is a textbook example of the subjective element run amok.

While it may be impossible to remove the subjective element completely, any serious attempt toward establishing a biblical theology of the royal psalms must take concrete steps designed to mitigate its deleterious effects. Thus a well-defined set of guidelines must be sought to provide as much objectivity as possible. Such guidelines, however, are more difficult to ascertain regarding the royal psalms than for other types of Psalms. Unlike the common genres of praise and lament for example, there seems to be no common structure to the royal psalms.⁶ Anderson, for example, finds two different forms in Psalm 89 (89:1-37 hymn, 89:38-51 lament) even though he classifies its overall message as a royal psalm.⁷ Therefore, their identification must be based upon subject matter and theme instead of organization or literary patterns. Bellinger argues,

⁶ It should be noted that Leupold insists that too much has been made of form and structure of the various genres within the Psalter. The goal of placing the individual psalm in “its proper pigeonhole” does not constitute the last word on the nature of that psalm. He reasons as follows:

“It is frequently being overlooked that the pattern or type involved is not so much a matter of traditional form as it is a purely natural procedure that is bound to be followed whether the types involved are clearly in the mind of the writer or not. There is a kind of natural logic about some of these procedures. When a man is in trouble and gives poetic vent to his emotions in a literary production or, for that matter, in a free outburst of prayer, it may well happen that without any reflection or without being conscious of any pattern he describes his situation in detail to the Lord. After this a lament might quite naturally follow, laying bare his inmost feelings and bitter pain. Such a lament might be repeated or dwelt on at greater length, depending on the extremity of the situation in which the man is involved. Then quite naturally could follow petitions for relief from the great distress. This prayer might be long or short as the feelings of the moment dictate. There could then follow more lament, if the prayer had failed to raise the petitioner above the level of his distress. Or there might follow a note of restored confidence and even a word of thanksgiving for the comfort and help received from the Lord.

No one would deny that the sequence of parts in such a psalm could be arranged in almost any order. One and the same man might be praying in one fashion this year and in quite another fashion three years hence. In other words, the rigidity of pattern has been stressed too much.” H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms* (Columbus, Ohio.; Wartburg Press, 1959), 11.

⁷ Bernhard W. Anderson, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today*, rev. and expanded ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 241.

The psalms of lament and praise are literary types in the strict sense, but the royal psalms are not. Our list of these psalms includes a variety of literary forms. The common characteristic that holds the category together is the king; the psalms relate to different settings in the life of the Jerusalem king. Because the king held a distinctive and prominent position in the life of the worshiping community, and because this group of psalms makes its own contribution to our understanding of a variety of themes and concerns in the Psalter, it makes sense to treat these texts separately. So while 'royal psalm' is not actually a literary type, there is justification for including it in our treatment of the various classes of psalms.⁸

While there have been previous attempts to classify the psalms,⁹ Leupold notes that after the publication of Gunkel's work in 1933,¹⁰ commentators have, for the most part, followed his classification pattern.¹¹ As part of his general classification of the psalms,¹² Gunkel listed ten psalms (with the possible addition of Psalm 89) as royal psalms: 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132, and 144.¹³ Bullock notes that this list has become "rather standard"¹⁴ while Futato notes that "a fairly strong consensus" affirms Gunkel's list.¹⁵

⁸ W. H. Bellinger, *Psalms: Reading and Studying the Book of Praises* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 106-107.

⁹ "In his Summarien Luther listed five classes of psalms as being outstanding. There were in his opinion first of all those psalms that were prophecies about the Christ; then there were doctrinal psalms; then psalms of comfort; then also prayer psalms; and lastly psalms of thanksgiving. Almost every writer that commented on the psalms after him had his own particular pattern of classification." Leupold, *Psalms*, 10.

¹⁰ Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *Einleitung in Die Psalmen*, 2d ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1966).

¹¹ Leupold, *Psalms*, 10.

¹² "As Gunkel sees it, there are seven classes to be observed. They are 1) hymns, 2) enthronement of Yahweh psalms, 3) national laments, 4) royal psalms, 5) laments of the individual, 6) psalms of individual thanksgiving, 7) lesser categories. In this last class are to be found six subheads: a) words of blessing and cursing, b) pilgrimage songs, c) hymns of victory, d) hymns of thanksgiving, e) the legend, f) the law." *Ibid.*, 10.

¹³ C. Hassell Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms : A Literary and Theological Introduction*, *Encountering Biblical Studies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 178.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Mark David Futato and David M. Howard, *Interpreting the Psalms: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 181.

While there may indeed be a “strong consensus,” this in no way implies uniformity. Bullock, rejecting form criticism as a valid investigative tool, prefers to emphasize “messianic psalms” instead of the more restrictive category of “royal psalms.” Still, he acknowledges that the “messianic psalms” may be divided into two types: 1) those dealing with the king and his rule (2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 61, 72, 89, 110, 132, 144), and 2) those that treat the man and his life generally (8, 16, 22, 35, 40, 41, 55, 69, 102, 109).¹⁶ It is the first of these two divisions—namely the king and his rule—that are generally seen as the subject of the royal psalms.

Methodology

Even though Gunkel’s list is the result of his adherence to form criticism, a careful examination using objective criteria will show that this list is not without merit. Put another way, one does not have to accept the tenants of form criticism to accept the results of Gunkel’s work, at least in this area.

¹⁶ C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books: Revised and Expanded* (Chicago: Moody, 1988), 137. The careful observer will note that his first list is identical to Gunkel’s with the exception of the addition of 61 and the omission of 101. Bullock notes that, of the latter category, every psalm is applied to Christ in the NT excepting 55. Bullock contends that these very human psalms find their “ultimate extensions and resolutions” in Christ. “David’s cry of abandonment in Psalm 22:1 was used in its Aramaic form by our Lord on the cross (Matt 27:46), and the author of Hebrews applied 22:22 to Christ (Heb 2:12). Psalm 16 centers upon the importance of finding one’s true identity in God. Peter quoted verses 8-11 in his Pentecost sermon to say that David’s personal affirmation was fulfilled absolutely in Christ’s resurrection (Acts 2:24-32). Our Lord Himself used Psalm 41:9 in reference to Judas’ betrayal of Him (John 13:18), although the real situation was that the psalmist had experienced some illness because of his sin (v. 4). There was a definite sense in which the human dilemma described in these psalms could not exhaust their meaning, and was, in fact, only a relative fulfillment. The absolute satisfaction of the terms of the psalm was effected only in and by Jesus Christ.” *Ibid.*, 139. In contrast, only Psalms 2, 18, 45, and 110 are directly quoted in the NT, although there are numerous allusions to them. *Ibid.*, 137.

As has been stated, the most common theme mentioned for the royal psalms is the king and his rule. While this is certainly descriptive of the psalms in question, a more exacting and objective criteria for identifying the royal psalms may be found in the Psalter itself.

Psalms 1 and 2 has pride of place in the Psalter as the first royal psalm in the collection and as one of the most quoted psalms in the New Testament.¹⁷ In fact, it has been suggested that Psalms 1 and 2 were intentionally placed at the beginning of the Psalter as introductory psalms that dealt with two central tenants that constituted the core of Israel's belief system.¹⁸ Therefore, since Psalm 2 is the first of its type and is placed in such a prominent position within the Psalter, it seems reasonable to conclude that the general theme of the royal psalms would be conspicuous within it. A careful examination shows this to indeed be the case.

¹⁷ Willem A. VanGemeren, "Psalms," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary with the New International Version of the Holy Bible*, ed. Frank E. Gaebel (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 65.

¹⁸ Anderson, *Out of the Depths*, 22. "These two themes—the revelation of God's will in the Torah and the hope for the coming of the Messiah to inaugurate God's kingdom—constituted the two cardinal beliefs of the Jewish people at the time the Psalter was given its final form." *Ibid.*, 22-23. While their placement at the beginning of the Psalter may or may not have been for introductory purposes, the pairing of these psalms is almost certainly not accidental. Leupold notes that "similar situations or contrasting situations often lead to putting two psalms side by side. Quite frequently similar words and phrases that occur in two psalms seem to have led to placing them side by side whatever their character may have otherwise been. This similar use of words and phrases strikes us as having been one of the most common factors in determining the placing of two psalms side by side." Leupold, *Psalms*, 4. So in these two psalms, the parallels are quite striking. The blessed man does not stand (dDmDo) in the way of the wicked (1:1) but the kings of the earth "take their stand" (...wbV...xÅyVt^y) against the LORD (2:2). Both the righteous and the wicked are muttering their thoughts (hîgDh), only the content of their musing is different (1:2; 2:1). Likewise, both psalms end with the LORD making a judgment concerning the righteous and the wicked, with either blessing or destruction as a result (1:5-6; 2:11-12).

The activity in Psalm 2 revolves around three major actors and a chorus.¹⁹ The major actors are the kings of the earth (or more generally the “nations”), the LORD, and his “anointed one.” The chorus consists of those who are allied with the king.

While the identity of the first two major actors is relatively obvious, one must engage in further study to determine the identity of the third major actor: the “anointed one” (מָשִׁיחַ). To aid the investigation, it is helpful to note that the LORD also calls the anointed one (מָשִׁיחַ) “my king,” (מֶלֶךְ vs 6) and “my son” (בֶּןִי vs 7) within the same psalm. While these three titles (anointed one, king and son) appear to be synonymous in Psalm 2, the king and the son have more than one referent elsewhere.

For example, Psalm 18:50 equates these three terms— the “king” (מֶלֶךְ), the LORD’s “anointed One” (מָשִׁיחַ) and “David and his seed forever” (דָּוִד וְלִדְוֹ עַד-עוֹלָם)—as synonymous. It is the mention of David’s offspring that shows a dual referent. On the one hand, the “anointed one” is David.²⁰ On the other hand, this “anointing” extends to the royal line of David forever. This, of course, is in keeping with God’s covenant with David as stipulated in 2 Samuel 7:12–16. Solomon is clearly the referent of the pronoun in vs 7:13 (“He is the one who will build a house for my name...”; cf 1 Kings 9:1-9). Yet it is the “greater son of David” that is in view in vs 7:16 (“And your house and your kingdom shall endure before me forever; your throne shall be established forever.”; cf Luke 1:32-33). Therefore, references to David or any of

¹⁹ This use of the word “chorus” harkens back to ancient Greek tragedies where a group of performers commented on the main action, typically speaking and moving together. For more information regarding the nature and role of the Greek chorus see N. S. Gill, “The Greek Chorus,” About.Com: Ancient/Classical History. Available from http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/greekliterature/a/GreekTheater_4.htm. Internet; accessed 30 July 2010.

²⁰ It should be noted that at his death, David is specifically called the “anointed of the God of Jacob,” (2 Sam 23:1).

his offspring, including the future rule of “David’s Son yet David’s Lord”²¹ may be referred to as the “king, or the “anointed one.”

In the same way, Psalm 2 makes clear that the king is God’s son by adoption (vs. 7). Once again, this idea harkens back to the Davidic Covenant. In 2 Samuel 7:14 God states that “I will be a father to him and he will be a son to me.” It is vital to notice that this divine adoption is descriptive of the entire Davidic line.²² Second Samuel 7:14, as quoted above, clearly refers to Solomon.²³ Yet in Psalm 89, David—who was anointed with holy oil (בְּשֶׁמֶן קֹדֶשׁ מִשְׁחָתִי vs 20)—is also adopted as a son, and not only a son, but the firstborn (בְּכֹר אֶתְנֶנּוּ vs 27)! In the same way, Jesus, the ultimate fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant, is called a son by the Apostle Paul (Acts 13:33) as he quotes Psalm 2:7.

Those allied with the king should be viewed as a chorus supporting the actions of the LORD and his king. They are described as either being the beneficiaries of the king’s goodness and protection, or as praising the king for what he has done. Their actual activity is limited and often merely implied with the first person plural pronoun. The function of this chorus seems to be limited to highlighting the uprightness and strength of the king. Therefore, while they are present in each psalm under investigation, they are usually found to be the recipient of the actions of others, rather than initiators of actions themselves. In Psalm 2, this character group is described in the last verse as “all who take refuge in him” (כָּל־חֹסֵי בּוֹ).

²¹ Taken from the hymn Stricken, Smitten and Afflicted by Thomas Kelly.

²² The concept of adoption as sons of an entire group of people is not without theological antecedent. The entire nation of Israel was identified as the firstborn son of God (לְעֵאדָרְבֶּן־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־בְּכֹרִים אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל Ex 4:22). In the same way, the adoption of Israel serves as a precedent for the adoption of the church (c.f. Rom 9:4; 8:23).

²³ “[W]hen he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men...” 2 Sam 7:14 NIV.

Thus the objective criteria sought after in this study may be found in the search for some mention of the LORD, the nations, and some combination of David, the king, the son, or the anointed one, and those allied with him. It should quickly be added that vocabulary alone is not sufficient to identify all the psalms with the appropriate theme. Just because a word is used in a psalm does not mean that the theme of the psalm is consistent with all other uses of the word. At the same time, the ideas expressed in these words may be communicated without employing the actual vocabulary being sought. Context, in addition to the mere vocabulary employed in a particular psalm, is an essential element in discovering its theme. Most concepts may be described with a multitude of different words. For example, Psalm 2:1 speaks of the nations (גוֹיִם) as a primary actor. This actor, however, is also described as the people (לְאֻמִּים vs 1), the kings of the earth (מַלְכֵי-אֶרֶץ vs 2), and the ones who rule (רוֹזְנִים). Thus a simple vocabulary search for the word “nations” (גוֹיִם) is not sufficient. Likewise, ordinary words may be used to express extraordinary concepts. Psalm 2:4 speaks of “He who sits in the heavens” (יֹשֵׁב בַּשָּׁמַיִם).²⁴ The word “sits” is an accurate translation of an ordinary word, but when used in the context of the LORD sitting in the heavens, it is just as correct to speak of him as “enthroned” as does the NIV. Nevertheless, one should expect some uniformity of description when the theme remains the same.²⁵ Thus when all three of these actors appear in a particular psalm, it seems safe to classify this psalm as a “royal psalm” after the pattern set in Psalm 2. The mention of the chorus discussed above will add credence to such a classification.

²⁴ This concept is also seen in Isa 6:1.

²⁵ If several strangers on a street corner witnessed an auto accident and were subsequently questioned by the police, it would be unusual indeed if there were no common elements or words to their eyewitness accounts.

When Gunkel’s list is examined with this criteria in mind—that is, the presence of these three major actors along with the minor character group, regardless of the specific vocabulary—one finds his list remarkably accurate. The following is an examination of each psalm in Gunkel’s list to see which of these characters are mentioned, if any.

INVESTIGATION

Psalm 2

Since this Psalm was used as the prototype for classification purposes, it comes as no surprise that Psalm 2 lists all four participants. In fact, the author records a dialog between the three major characters listed.

“Let us tear off their bonds and fling from us their ropes” (אֶת־מוֹסְרוֹתֵינוּ וְנִשְׁלִיכָהּ מִמֶּנּוּ עַבְדֵינוּ) cry the nations. Thus do the “kings of the earth” (מְלָכֵי־אֲרֶץ) take their stand and the rulers (רוֹזְנִים) take council with one another against the “LORD and his anointed one” (יְהוָה וְיָחִידוֹ). (עַל־יְהוָה).

The one who “sits in the heavens” laughs (יִשְׁחַק) and scoffs at them (יִלְעַג־לָמוֹ) for this outrageous claim. His angry retort is that he has installed “my king” on Zion (מֶלֶךְ עַל־צִיּוֹן) (וְאֲנִי נִסְכָּתִי).

When the king speaks, he speaks only the LORD’s words.²⁶ He calls him “My Son” (בְּנִי) and speaks of his plans for the violent repression of the rebellion of the nations. With a “scepter of

²⁶ See this same pattern in John 8:26, 28; 12:49.

iron” (בְּשִׁבְט בְּרִזָּל) he will “shatter them like pottery” (בְּכֶלִי יוֹצֵר הַנִּפְצָצִים). This concept of warfare by the LORD against the world will be a major theme of these psalms.

Interestingly, there are two possible destinies for the nations. These destinies are dependent, not upon their relationship with the LORD directly, but indirectly through their relationship with the Son. Verse twelve speaks of wrath against his enemies and blessing for those who take refuge in him. Here is found the chorus. It is those who “Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling” (עֲבָדוּ אֶת־יְהוָה בְּיִרְאָה וְגִילּוֹ בְרַעְעָה).

Thus we see in this psalm the LORD, his anointed one, the nations as enemies of them both, and those out of the nations that serve the Son and are blessed in their refuge.

Psalm 18

In this psalm, David calls himself the “servant of the LORD” (לְעַבְד יְהוָה לְדָוִד) (18:1 HMT²⁷) and spends the majority of his time giving thanks for the LORD’s deliverance from his enemies (אֹיְבִי). These “enemies” were deadly (“the ropes of death surrounded me” — חֲבִלֵי־מָוֶת) and their actions are described as “torrents of wickedness” (נַחֲלֵי בְלִיעֵל). His enemies hated him (שָׂנְאוּ) and waited until the “day of my calamity” (בְּיוֹם־אִיְדִי) so that they were too strong for him (כִּי־אֶמְצֵוּ מִמֶּנִּי).

While David calls himself the “servant of the LORD,” the LORD calls him “his king,” (מֶלֶכִּי) and “His anointed” (מְשִׁיחוֹ). These two titles belong to “David and his seed forever” (וְלִזְרְעוֹ עַד־עוֹלָם) (לְדָוִד).

This attack upon the anointed king causes the LORD to fly to battle. While most of the terms used to describe the LORD’s salvation are associated with creation (lightning, darkness, clouds,

²⁷ Unless marked, all references will be taken from the English Bible.

hailstones, wind, many waters, and so forth), some are borrowed from the arena of warfare. For example, the LORD sent out “arrows” (הַצִּיּוֹ) so that the enemy was “scattered” (יִפְיֹצֵם) and “thrown into confusion” or “routed” (סִצְּפִי).

Not only are warfare terms used to describe the LORD’s actions, they are also used of the enablement he gives to his anointed king. The LORD “trains his hands for war” (יָדַי לְמִלְחָמָה) and “his arms can bend a bow of bronze” (נִחְתָּהּ קִשְׁת־נְחוּשָׁה זְרוּעֹתַי). He gives him the “shield of salvation” (מָגֵן יִשְׁעָךְ) and “girds him for battle” (וַתִּאַזְרְנֵי חֵיַל לְמִלְחָמָה). As a result David pursues (אֶרְדֹּף) and overtakes (אֲשִׁיגֵם) his enemies, and destroys (בְּגִישָׁא) them. As a result of this violent confrontation, David is delivered from the “strife of the people” (מְרִיבֵי עַם) and is placed as the head of the nations.

The chorus is again seen as the beneficiary of the LORD’s goodness. Described as an “afflicted people” (עַם־עֲנִי), they join in the praise of God with the king by proclaiming, “Who is a rock besides our God?” (וְיִמֵי צוּר זִוְלָתֵי אֱלֹהֵינוּ)—It is important to note the use of the first person plural). Thus it is that the king is able to give thanks to God “among the nations” (יַיִם־בְּנֵי).²⁸

As in the previous psalm, all four characters—the LORD, the king, the nations, and the king’s willing subjects—are present. Likewise, one of the main ideas expressed is the suppression of the peoples so that the anointed king may be installed as “head of the nations” (רֹאשׁ גּוֹיִם).

Psalm 20

²⁸ Paul quotes this verse in Romans 15:9 to press home his teaching that the Gentiles may also glorify God because of his mercy.

Here as well, all four characters are present. In verses 1-4, the LORD is the subject of each sentence.

Verse five records a shift from the 3rd person singular pronoun to the 2nd person singular. This new referent is identified in verse 6 as “the LORD’s anointed” (יְהוָה מְשִׁיחוֹ), and in verse 9 as “the king” (הַמֶּלֶךְ). Interestingly, there is an intercession on behalf of the king by his subjects in this verse. There are two short prayers in this verse, both dealing with deliverance from an unstated enemy. The first prayer requests salvation for the king, the second requests salvation for the people who follow the king—identified with the first person plural pronoun “us” (יִצְעָנֵנוּ). This concept harkens back to Psalm 2:12, where a blessing is pronounced upon those who take refuge in the Son (אֲשֶׁרֵי כָּל־חַוְסֵי בּוֹ).

The third major actor is not explicitly mentioned by any of the names one might expect (such as enemies, nations, rulers, peoples, etc.), but is unmistakably present. This prayer to the LORD is offered when the king is “in the day of distress” (בְּיֹמֵי צָרָה). There will be singing when God grants the king “victory”²⁹ (יִשְׁעֵתֶדֶד) and banners (such as are carried in battle to identify the various tribes) will be set up (נִדְגָּל). The questions these statements raise is over whom is the king granted victory? The answer is found in verse seven. It is those who boast in their military might instead of the LORD (אֵלֶּה בָּרָכָב וְאֵלֶּה בַּפִּיִּים). It is important to note that, once again, the concept of military defeat of the king’s enemies is prominent. The enemies have either been subjugated (in that they have bowed down כָּרְעוּ) or they have been killed in battle (they have fallen נִפְּלוּ).

²⁹ This word could also be translated “salvation,” (BDB loc.cit) but the question then becomes salvation from what? The only choice is salvation from his enemies.

Thus as before, the LORD, his king, his subjects, and their enemies are mentioned, along with the idea of military conquest over the enemies.

Psalm 21

One of the more difficult aspects of Psalm 21 is determining who is the subject in certain portions. In verses 1-6, the address is to the LORD with the king spoken of in the third person. In this section, all the actions of the LORD are for the benefit of the king. In fact, the blessings bestowed upon the king indicate that the recipient of these blessings is not David and his decedents, but the greater son of David himself, Jesus Christ. For example, he is given “length of days forever and ever” (אָרְךָ יָמִים עוֹלָם וָעֶד) and he is “blessed forever” (בְּרִכּוֹת לְעֶד).

Verse seven acts as a hinge in the psalm where both the LORD and the king are spoken of in the third person. Understanding that when the subject of a sentence is a pronoun the referent to the pronoun is the subject of the preceding clause, verses 8-12 shifts the direct address to the king himself. Thus, the second half of this psalm recounts what the king is able to accomplish due to the LORD’s enablement.

Once again we have evidence that the king is none other than the Lord Jesus due to the nature and extent of his judgment. The king will find “all [his] enemies” (כָּל-אֹיְבָיִךְ). At the “time of his appearing” (לְעֵת פָּגִיעֶךָ), “he will swallow them up in his wrath” (יִהְיֶה בָאֵפוֹ יִבְלַעֵם), and a “fire will devour them” (תֹּאכְלֵם אֵשׁ). This language foreshadows later revelation concerning the Second Coming.

The behavior of the enemies is consistent with what has been described in the previous psalms. They “hate” (שִׂנְאִיךָ) the king, “intend evil” (בִּי-נָטוּ עֲלֶיךָ רָעָה) against him, and “purposed evil devices” (תִּשְׁבוּ קְזוּמָה). They will “not be able” (בְּלִי-יָכֹל) to accomplish their

wicked schemes, however, because of the violent military intervention of the king who “aims [his] bowstrings at their faces” (מִיתְקַרֵּיךְ תִּכּוּנֵן עַל־פְּנֵיהֶם).

The subjects of the king close the psalm with a vow of praise. Again, they are bystanders observing the action of the main three actors.

Once again in the psalm, we find the theme of the violent overthrow of those who oppose the LORD and his anointed. This theme keeps re-appearing because of the nature of the enemies and the nature of the LORD and his anointed one. The nations will not yield, so the LORD destroys them through overwhelming force.

Psalm 45

When read in a plain and ordinary way, Psalm 45 not only fits the criteria set above but also makes an important statement about the nature of the anointed king. The king is none other than God himself. This is easily shown by reading the divine commentary provided in Hebrews 1:8-9. But there is no reason to leave the immediate context of the psalm to illustrate this truth.

While these verses are composed for the king (vs 1), the title of the psalm makes it clear that it is didactic in nature and intended for public worship. The phrase “of” or “to the Sons of Korah” (לְבָנֵי־קֹרַח) leaves it unclear as to whether they were the composers or performers of this song. Nevertheless, their prominent position in the Psalter,³⁰ their responsibilities in the house of God (1 Chron 9:19), as well as their readiness to lead in public worship (1 Chron 20:19) demands this song be taken as part of the worship liturgy. Likewise the descriptive title מִשְׁכִּיל (instruction) identifies this as a song designed for contemplation.

³⁰ Eleven psalms — 42, 44–49, 84, 85, 87, and 88— are attributed to them.

As one begins the investigation, one jarring difference sets this psalm apart from the others. This psalm alone among the collection does not use God's covenant-keeping name יהוה, but instead uses אֱלֹהִים. There is no question, of course, that these two names are synonymous with regard to their referent. But there does seem to be a different emphasis attached to each one. While doing a full-orbed study of these two names is beyond the scope of this study, one can hazard a guess as to the unique change in names for this psalm.

Psalm 45 is sometimes called a “marriage” psalm because of the instructions to the bride of the king given in verses 10-15.³¹ While it is true that a royal wedding is being discussed in this song, the larger subject seems to be the character of the king himself. It is because he is “more beautiful than the sons of man” (יִפְיֹפִיתָ מִבְּנֵי אָדָם) that she is to forget her people and her father's house (שָׁכַחְתִּי עַמִּי וּבֵית אָבוֹתַי). In fact, the king is identified as at once God himself yet a person distinct from God.

This apparent paradox is found in verses 5 and 6, and these two verses have been troublesome to many commentators.³² Taken at face value, the throne of God (אֱלֹהִים taken as a vocative) is the subject of verse 6, where the insignias of royalty (throne, scepter, kingdom) are prominent. The throne could just as easily have been the king's, as the statements made about this throne are made elsewhere about the anointed one. Verse 7 continues talking about the same person (אֱלֹהִים) by using the second person masculine pronoun for the subject of the sentence. What makes this troublesome to some is that God (אֱלֹהִים), who is the subject of the

³¹ It is clear that the subject changes in the last two verses of the psalm due to the change from the feminine to the masculine pronouns employed.

³² For a review of the various possible translations and theological implications see Martin H. Woudstra, “Theological Influence On Translation,” JETS 10.2 (1967), 95-100.

sentence, is described as a separate person in the second clause. Inserting the vocative of verse 6 into verse 7 illustrates the construction.

Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of your kingdom. You [O God] have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of joy above your companions.

The fact that some commentators find this difficult is not traceable to any unusual Hebrew construction, but to what can only be called an anti-prophetic bias towards the psalms in general. Broyles' exception to the very plain statements of the text are typical.

The phrase "Your throne, O God," is problematic because it appears to address the human king as divine.... While kings of Egypt and early Mesopotamia may have claimed divinity, the OT is elsewhere most explicit that this was not the case for Yahweh's appointed king. The closest the OT gets is in the language of Yahweh's "begetting" the royal "son," but this is simply a metaphor (see on 2:7 and 110:3).³³

Yet this explanation ignores the possibility that this composition could be primarily prophetic in nature. Additionally, any other translation other than the one proposed above, twists the Hebrew text like a wax nose. Kidner's understanding is much preferred.

The RSV, NEB, and RP (but not JB nor Gelineau) have sidestepped the plain sense of verse 6 (which is confirmed by the ancient versions and by the New Testament) by reducing the words "Thy throne, O God" to something less startling. But the Hebrew resists any softening here, and it is the New Testament, not the new versions, which does it justice when it uses it to prove the superiority of God's Son to the very angels (Heb 1:8f). Adding to this, verse 7 distinguishes between *God, your God*, and the king who has been addressed as "God" in verse 6. This paradox is consistent with the incarnation, but mystifying in any other context. It is an example of Old Testament language bursting

³³ Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms*, New International Biblical Commentary. Old Testament Series 11 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 207.

its banks, to demand a more than human fulfillment (as did Ps. 110:1, according to our Lord).³⁴

The most natural reading, therefore, makes אֱלֹהִים both God and king, while maintaining God as a separate person who establishes the king. While it would be difficult to establish a fully fleshed-out trinitarian theology from the royal psalms, it is instructive to note that another name for the king is son. Thus, when understood prophetically, it is easy to see the identification of the LORD and his anointed one.

As before, the enemies present themselves and God (or possibly the king, as it is difficult to tell the referent of the “mighty one” (גִּבּוֹר)) establishes his military superiority over them. He straps on his sword (חֲגוֹר-חַרְבּוֹ עַל-יָרֵךְ) and with sharp arrows (חֲצִיזֵי שְׁנוּנִים) the heart of the enemies are pierced (בָּלַב אוֹיְבֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ) so that the peoples fall beneath him (עַמִּים תִּחַתָּיָהּ יִפְּלוּ).

Those that remain are subjugated to him so that they seek his favor. The “daughter of Tyre” presents a gift (וּבַת-צֹר בְּמִנְחָה), and the richest men seek the king’s face (פְּנֵיךְ יִחַלּוּ עֲשִׂירֵי עָם). In this case, the “daughter of Tyre” most likely represents the population of a city and not an individual.³⁵ Tyre was considered one of, if not *the*, leading city of commerce during the time of David and Solomon.³⁶ The many good that could be found in her markets as well as her trading partners are listed in detail in Ezekiel 27. It was natural, therefore, for those of David’s day to refer to Tyre as a symbol for wealth and commerce in the world. The construction which places the “daughter of Tyre” epexegetically with “the richest men” adds support for this

³⁴ J. A. Alexander, *The Psalms* ([n.p.]: 1850; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), 203-204.

³⁵ The “daughter of Zion” in Psalm 9:14 is another instance of the population of a city being referred to as a daughter.

³⁶ For a complete discussion see R. K. Harrison, ed., *Major Cities of the Biblical World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985).

understanding. The prophetic nature of this psalm also supports this interpretation, for Isaiah 23:17-18³⁷ predicts that Tyre's wealth will go to the LORD's people, mentioning specifically "fine clothing" such as the bride is wearing here. Finally, if the "daughter of Tyre" were a part of the king's loyal subjects, this would be the only place in the royal psalms where those allied with the LORD and his anointed one perform an action other than prayer or praise.

As in the other psalms examined, the chorus—that is, those loyal to the king—are also present. While there are others mentioned—the virgin attendants and the brides companions—it is the bride who receives the most attention. Interestingly, the bride has her origins from among the nations, but has been selected by the king to be his bride. She is commanded to "forget her people and her father's house" (שָׁכַחַי עַמִּי וּבַיִת אָבוֹתַי) and instead bow down (הִשְׁתַּחֲוֶי-לוֹ) to her Lord (אֲדֹנָיָהּ). While most of the other royal psalms are alluding to the Davidic Covenant, this instruction harkens back to the Abrahamic Covenant as recorded in Genesis 12:1. The fact that the bride comes from among the nations, rather than from Israel, makes it difficult for those familiar with the New Testament to ignore what appears to be a foreshadowing of the king's relationship with the Gentile nations. While it goes too far to call this a prediction of the Church, it does seem to be in line with other OT texts (such as Amos 9:11, 12) that predict a relationship between the future king in his Kingdom and the Gentile nations.

³⁷ "And it will come about at the end of seventy years that the LORD will visit Tyre. Then she will go back to her harlot's wages, and will play the harlot with all the kingdoms on the face of the earth. And her gain and her harlot's wages will be set apart to the LORD; it will not be stored up or hoarded, but her gain will become sufficient food and choice attire for those who dwell in the presence of the LORD." Isa 23:17-18 NASB

It should also be noted that the bride and her companions do not initiate any actions. The bride is led (תובל) to the king. Her royal wedding garments seem to be a gift from him as well. This lack of action is in keeping with all the previous psalms.

Psalm 72

All the characters indicative of a royal psalm are present within the first four verses of this prayer by Solomon. The prayer is directed to God (אלהים) later identified as יהוה אלהים in vs 18) on behalf of the king. He asked for the ability to reign righteously (requesting God's "judgments" (משפטיך) and "righteousness" (צדקתך)) so that he may "vindicate the afflicted of the people" (ישפט עניים) and "save the sons of the needy" (ישוע לבני אביון).

Later in the psalm, those loyal to the king are described as "the needy" (אביון) who "have no helper" (אין עזר לו). But it isn't merely economic justice that is being offered. The king rescues their lives from oppression and violence (מתורד ומקומם) because "their blood is precious in his eyes" (יקר דמם בעיניו). It should be noted that the reason the needy are afflicted is not because of inequities in the Law, but because of the actions of the enemy. Here the enemy is called the "oppressor" (עושק). As a result of their deliverance, they are to pray³⁸ for the king continually and bless him all day long (יתפלל בעדו תמיד כל-היום וברכנהו). Again, prayer and thanksgiving seem to be the only actions attributed to the chorus—those loyal to the king.

While the previous psalms have all touched on this theme, in Psalm 72 the major idea seems to be the world-wide rule of the king. The prayer is that he would reign "from sea to

³⁸ There is a question whether to translate the yiqtol conjugations in Psalm 72 as non-perfective futures (i.e. predictions as in the KJV and NIV) or as jussives (i.e. prayers as in NASB). What is without doubt is the force of the qal imperative NE;t ("give") in verse one. This is clearly a request for God to give "judgments" to the king's son. While there remains a question as to the character of the rest of the Psalm, it seems best to continue the thought of the opening verse and take the Psalm as referring to prayer.

sea” (וַיִּרְדָּךְ מִיַּם עַד-יָם) unto the “end of the earth” (עַד-אַפְסֵי-אֲרֶץ). This universal reign will have the following characteristics: 1) prosperity: even on the tops of mountains there will be grain (יְהִי פֶסֶת-בָּר בְּאֲרָץ בְּרֹאשׁ הַרִים), 2) health: the population center will “flourish like vegetation of the earth” (וַיִּצְיָצוּ מִעֵיר כְּעֵשֶׂב הָאָרֶץ), 3) it will be eternal: as long as the sun and moon endure (וַיִּרְאוּךָ עַם-שָׁמַיִם וְלִפְנֵי יְרַח דְּדוֹרִים), 4) it will be characterized by an “abundance of peace” (רַב שְׁלוֹם).

While it is the king who rules this kingdom, it is important to note that Psalm 72 is a prayer to God that this kingdom might be established. He is the one who grants these blessings to the king since he is the one “who alone works wonders” (עֹשֶׂה נִפְלְאוֹת לְבַדּוֹ).

Psalm 89

While the previous psalm emphasized the world-wide rule of the king, this psalm addresses the eternal nature of the covenant with David and his offspring. This theme is clearly seen in the opening verses. The word “forever” (עוֹלָם) is used three times in the first four verses and the phrase “to all generations” (לְדוֹר וָדוֹר) is used twice. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the first thirty-seven verses discuss the everlasting nature of the Davidic covenant, quoting the stipulations of the covenant directly.

It should also be noted that three of the four actors are mentioned in this introductory section. The author is Ethan the Ezrahite. For this study it matters not the history or identity of this person.³⁹ What is important is that it is a person not the king, yet loyal to the king. He sings of the LORD’s great love (חֶסֶד־יְהוָה) and faithfulness (אֱמוּנָתְךָ), both terms repeated in the second verse. The way these characteristics of the LORD are displayed is in the covenant he

³⁹ Unlike some other Psalms, especially Psalm 110, where the identity of the author is vital to interpretation.

made with David—who is called “my chosen one” (בְּחִירִי) and “my servant” (עַבְדִּי)—and his offspring (זֶרְעֶךָ) forever. Conspicuous by its absence is any mention of the nations or the enemy in the introduction.

The importance of the everlasting nature of the covenant is seen in vss 38-45, for the actual circumstances surrounding the composition of this psalm point to a different conclusion. It is in this section that the enemy is prominent. Surprisingly, however, the majority of the actions described in this stanza are not to the adversaries, but to the LORD. For example:

- you have spurned and rejected (וְאַתָּה זָנַחְתָּ וְתַמְאַסָּה), vs 38
- you have been full of anger with your anointed (הִתְעַבְרָתָּ עִם־מְשִׁיחֶךָ), vs 38
- you have abhorred the covenant of your servant (נִאֲרַתָּה בְרִית עַבְדְּךָ), vs 39
- you have profaned his crown in the land (חָלַלְתָּ לְאַרְצֵךְ כִּיָּוֶן), vs 39
- you have broken down all the walls (פָּרַצְתָּ כָּל־גְּדֵרֹתָיו), vs 40
- you have brought his fortresses to ruin (שָׁמַתָּ מִבְּצָרָיו מִתְּהָה), vs 40
- you have exalted the right hand of his adversaries (תְּרִימוֹת יְמִין צָרָיו), vs 42
- you have caused all of his enemies to rejoice (הִשְׂמַחְתָּ כָּל־אוֹיְבָיו), vs 42
- you have caused to return the edge of his sword (אַרְבֵּת־שִׁיב צוּר תְּרַבּוֹ), vs 43
- you have not caused him to stand in battle (וְלֹא תִקְוִימוֹתוֹ בְּמִלְחָמָה), vs 43
- you have put an end to his purity (הִשְׁבַּתָּ מְטָהְרוֹ), vs 44
- you have cast his throne to the ground (כִּסְאוֹ לְאַרְצֵךְ מִגִּרְתָּה), vs 44
- you have shortened the days of his youth (הִקְצַרְתָּ יָמָיו עַל־יָמָיו), vs 45
- you have covered him with shame (הִעֲטִיתָ עָלָיו בּוֹשָׁה), vs 45

Because of these direct actions of the LORD, all who pass by on the road plunder the king (שָׁסְהוּ כָּל־עַבְרֵי דָרֶךְ), and he has become a reproach to his neighbors (הָיָה תְּרֻפָּה לְשֹׁכְנָיו). Thus it would seem that the LORD has broken his covenant with the offspring of David.

That this is *not* the case is the main idea of this psalm. Not only is the introduction a reiteration of the eternity of the covenant, but vss 30-33 is an amplification of 2 Samuel 7:14. Here the LORD includes, as a stipulation of the covenant, the promise to reprove (הִכְהִיתִיו) with the rod of men and the wounds of the sons of men (בְּשֹׁבֵט אֲנָשִׁים וּבַנְּגָעֵי בְנֵי אָדָם) the one in the Davidic line who commits iniquity (בְּהַעֲוֹתוֹ).

It is the tension between the promise of eternal love and faithfulness in the introduction and the actions of the LORD on behalf of the king's enemies that makes poignant the cry, "How long, O LORD? Will you hide yourself forever?" (עַד־מָה יְהִיָּה תִסְתָּר לְנִצְחָה). While it remains unclear whether the personal masculine pronoun is referencing Ethan the Ezrahite or the king, what is clear is that the ones loyal to the king are included in the petitions. "Remember O Lord, the reproach of your servants" (זָכֹר אֱלֹהֵי תְרֻפַת עַבְדֶּיךָ), pleads the author.

It is also interesting to note that, while the king remains under the chastening of the LORD, he is still referred to as "your anointed one" (מְשִׁיחֶךָ). Thus we have curious position of the enemies taunting the footsteps of "your" anointed one (תְּרַפּוּ עַקְבוֹת מְשִׁיחֶךָ). While this was certainly true of the king under the reproach of the LORD due to his transgression of the Law, it also seems to foreshadow the greater son of David in his first advent.

Psalm 89, therefore, clearly meets the qualifications set forth as a royal psalm. All four characters are present, and they respond in a predictable fashion. The LORD is true to the Davidic covenant, even in the stipulations of discipline with the wounds of men. The king is in

the line of David and still considered the anointed one even when enduring discipline. The enemies attack the LORD's anointed one and taunt his footsteps. Those loyal to the king cry out to the LORD for deliverance.

Psalm 101

Identifying the four characters in this psalm is slightly more difficult than in some of the others. A careful examination of the text, however, reveals the presence of each one.

The presence of the LORD (יְהוָה) is quickly seen as David makes his lovingkindness and justice (חֶסֶד וּמִשְׁפָּט) the object of his praise. Likewise, the actions that David promises center in “the city of the LORD” (עִיר־יְהוָה).

The character of the king is expressed in several ways. First, David is listed as the author. This in and of itself is not conclusive due to the tenuous nature of the superscriptions in the psalms.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, when one considers the nature of his promised deeds, it becomes clear that the author is acting in a royal capacity, for only a king could accomplish such things.

For the first several verses, David speaks of his own personal holiness. Beginning with verse five however, he takes the seat of a judge, administering the lovingkindness and justice spoken of in verse one.

For example, his lovingkindness is demonstrated by choosing the one whose walk is blameless (תָּמִים) to minister (יִשְׁרָתֵנִי) before him. His eyes are on the faithful of the land (עֵינַי בְּנֹאמְרֵי־אֶרֶץ), so that they may dwell with him (לְשֹׁבֵת עִמָּדִי). Here we find the presence of the chorus. As before, they are the passive recipients of the king's goodness. No action is attributed to them.

⁴⁰ Although this author believes them to be accurate unless convincing evidence is presented to the contrary.

In contrast, his justice is expressed toward another major actor in the royal psalms: “all the wicked of the land” (כָּל־רָשָׁעֵי־אֶרֶץ). This justice takes the form of capital punishment (lit. to cut them off לְהַכְרִית). This is clearly a prerogative that belongs to the king alone. While this is behavior expected of a righteous king, what is interesting is the extent to which justice is administered. It is not limited to those who have committed open and obvious crimes, but extends to those “who slander their friend in secret” (מְלוֹשְׁנֵי [מְלֹשְׁנֵי] בַסֶּתֶר רַעְיוֹ). While it could be this secret crime has become public, it seems more in keeping with the actual wording that this crime is indeed a secret one. Additionally, this is not normally considered a capital crime. Thus it seems possible that David is writing the words of the ultimate king to come. When one considers the absolute nature of his promised character and compares that with his confessions of his own sin (Psalms 37 and 51 come to mind), this possibility becomes more likely.

Psalm 110

Psalm 110 stands apart from the other royal psalms in several respects. First, the authorship is an important issue that must be settled before one can honestly approach the psalm. Second, there are significant translation issues that must be faced. Third, the king is also called a priest, a distinction unknown in the other psalms. Fourth, the chorus could be seen as performing an action, although this is not at all certain.

Concerning the authorship, the New Testament witness concerning the author and character of Psalm 110 should be taken seriously. This in no way implies that one should allow the New Testament to reinterpret the Old Testament. The Old Testament should be allowed to

speak on its own. Yet there are a number of places where the New Testament explicitly states certain truths about this psalm. This witness should be taken as authoritative.

Modern critics have tended to see this psalm as an enthronement oracle for either David or one in his line, written in the fashion of the enthronement oracles of the surrounding pagan nations by some unknown cultic official. For example, M. J. Paul informs us, “the majority of the exegetes regard the speaker in the psalm as a cultic prophet, or an unknown priest addressing the king. Only a small minority believes David to be the author.”⁴¹ This view has no support other than mere conjecture, and more importantly, as Kidner so eloquently notes, “Our Lord and the apostles, it is understood, were denied this insight.”⁴²

On our Lord’s own authority, we know Psalm 110’s messianic quality (Luke 20:41), its Davidic authorship (Luke 20:42), and its rightful place in the canon (Matt. 22:43). Twice he used the phrase “David himself” to describe the speaker (Mark 12:36-37). Additionally, what is a superscription in the English translations (A Psalm of David) is the first line of the psalm in the Masoretic Text (לְדָוִד מִזְמוֹר).

Understanding David as the author answers another important question. Is the king in question an idealized portrait of what the human king should be or is he someone who is yet to come that is more than a mere man? Alexander answers these questions with the following unequivocal assertion: “The repeated, explicit, and emphatic application of this psalm, in the

⁴¹ M. J. Paul, "The Order of Melchizedek (Ps 110:4 and Heb 7:3)," Westminster Theological Journal 49, no. (1987): 195. (Spring 1987):

⁴² Derek Kidner, Psalms 73-150 : A Commentary on Books Iii-V of the Psalms, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), 392.

New Testament, to Jesus Christ, is so far from being arbitrary or at variance with the obvious import of the psalm itself, that any other application is ridiculous.”⁴³

While such confidence might be jarring to modern sensibilities, Alexander’s conviction is not unfounded. The portrait painted by the psalmist is of such extraordinary stature that only the Messiah can fully meet the qualifications set forth. He is a king who is completely identified with the LORD. It is the king’s scepter (vs 2), yet it is the LORD who wields it from Zion (מִטְּהָ-עֵדָה וְשָׁלַח יְהוָה מִצִּיּוֹן). At some point in the future, the Lord (אֲדֹנָי), a title used in the psalm for the king, will shatter all other kings in the day of his anger (מִמְחֵץ בְּיוֹם-אַפּוֹ מְלָכִים). He will judge among the nations (יִדְרִין בְּגוֹיִם), filling them with dead bodies (מְלֵא גוֹיֹת). The actions assigned to the king in vss 5-7, are merely an expansion of what the LORD has promised to do for the king in vs 1: make his enemies a footstool for his feet (עַד-אַשִׁית אֲבִיבָיָה הָרָם לְרַגְלָיָהּ). Again, the idea expressed is of both the LORD and the king working in tandem toward the same end. In the meantime he is invited to sit at the right hand of God ⁴⁴ while awaiting that day.

Not only is he a king, but he has also been appointed by God as a priest (vs 4). Yet his priesthood is unique in that it lasts forever and is after the order of Melchizedek and not after the Levitical line of the high priest Aaron (אֲתֶה-כֹּהֵן לְעוֹלָם עַל-דְּבַרְתִּי מִלְכִּי-צֶדֶק). Clearly, no one in history has met the qualifications for either the king or the priest described here, let alone both. Only the Messiah, true God and true man, satisfies the description of the person David calls, “My Lord.”

⁴³ Alexander, Psalms, 456.

⁴⁴ “To be at the right side is to be identified as being in the special place of honor (1 Kings 2:19; Ps 45:9). Thus the full participation of the risen Christ in God’s honor and glory is emphasized by his being at God’s right hand (Acts 2:33–34; Heb 1:3).” Dictionary of biblical imagery, s.v. "Dictionary of Biblical Imagery." Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longmann III, gen. ed., Dictionary of Biblical Imagery, consulting ed. Colin Duriez, Douglas Penney, Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 728.

Some have contended that this is a description of David in his role as king and priest. Allen, for example, contends that this psalm describes a “divinely appointed successor to the dynastic line of Jebusite priest-kings,” even though he admits that in practice there was very little use of this honor in a cultic capacity.⁴⁵ Yet this explanation must be utterly rejected. It is almost inconceivable that God would maintain a dynastic line of priest-kings in a nation that he commanded be utterly destroyed because of the way their sins had polluted the land (Deut. 20:17; Lev. 18:24).

Merrill, in contrast, adopts a more conservative approach in his defense of David as the priest-king described in Psalm 110:

Being of the order of Melchizedek was also the basis of David’s role as royal priest and of his selection of Jerusalem as the site of the ark and tabernacle. He understood that just as Melchizedek had been king of Salem, so he, as successor to Melchizedek, must reign from Jerusalem. And just as Melchizedek was priest of God Most High, so he, as successor to Melchizedek in an order that was superior to that of Aaron, could exercise the holy privilege of priesthood before Yahweh. Thus on theological grounds, David could establish Jerusalem as cult center as well as political capital....⁴⁶

Yet this explanation must also be rejected. Merrill builds his entire case upon the role that David played in establishing Jerusalem as the center for worship, his leading the procession that carried the ark dressed in a linen ephod, and the absence of any mention of a priest during the following sacrifices. Such slight evidence cannot carry the weight of such a substantial assertion. Additionally, any person other than the Messiah who is assigned the role of “my Lord” in Psalm 110 must be placed there through a generous helping of hyperbole. What is one

⁴⁵ “From his Jebusite predecessors he inherited the title of priest to Yahweh the Most High God, as sacred mediator between God and his people.” Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1983), 86-87.

⁴⁶ Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests : A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 265-266.

to do with such phrases as “sit at my (God’s) right hand” or “crushing the rulers of the whole earth” if someone other than the Messiah is meant?

If one takes Psalm 110 in its most straightforward and natural sense, without resorting to hyperbole or conjecture, it becomes clear that the Messiah alone is the one being described. Thus, when Jesus uses these words to confound his critics in Luke 20 and Peter uses them to point to the deity of Christ in Acts 2, both were using the psalm in its most obvious sense.⁴⁷

Little needs to be said about the presence of the enemies. They are clearly seen throughout the psalm and meet the fate afforded to them in the other psalms. It is the role of the chorus that requires additional attention.

Verse 3 is the only verse that mentions those loyal to the king. The translation problems associated with this verse, however, make it difficult to ascertain exactly what is being said about them.

The New International Version translates the beginning of verse 3 (עַמְּךָ נְדָבָת בַּיּוֹם חִילָּךְ) as, “Your troops will be willing on your day of battle.” While this rendering might capture the broader sense of the clause, strictly speaking it fails as “translation” in that it completely ignores the Hebrew grammar. The word translated “willing” (נְדָבָת) is a feminine plural substantive, not an adjective that modifies the masculine singular noun “your people” (עַמְּךָ). Instead, the plural noun is better translated “free-will offerings,” since this is its common usage in the Mosaic Law and the Psalms.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ “It is plain that there can be no lower reference of the Psalm to David or any other Jewish monarch. It is a prediction, and a prediction of the Christ as the true King, as the everlasting Priest after the order of Melchizedek. Nor is there anything to startle us in such a conclusion, unless we are prepared to deny altogether the possibility of a revelation of the future.” John James Stewart Perowne, *Commentary on the Psalms* (London; G. Bell and sons; 1878-1879; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1989), 296.

⁴⁸ For its usage in the Law see Ex 25:2; 35:29; 36:3; and Lev 22:23. This word is also used in Psalm 54:6.

If one provides a correlative verb,⁴⁹ the text would read, “your people offer free-will offerings.” While this is a possible rendering, the more common substantive verb⁵⁰ is to be preferred. Thus the text would read, “your people are free-will offerings.” That the reflexive⁵¹ use of the concept of free-will offerings is demonstrated in both the Old and New Testaments⁵² gives credence to this interpretation.

The next phrase “in the day of your strength” (בְּיֹם חֵילְךָ) seems to be an obvious reference to the time described in verse 5 as “the day of his anger” (בְּיֹם אַפּוֹ). Thus, at some point during this military engagement, those that are loyal to the king offer themselves as free-will offerings to be used as he determines. What is not stated, however, is whether this offering takes place at the beginning of the conflict, in the midst of the conflict, or after the engagement has finished. This lack of detail makes the expositor’s job more difficult. For knowing the timing of the offering would go a great way in determining the task to which they offer themselves. Since this information, however, is not given, other clues must be sought.

The next phrase “in the majesty (or ornaments) of holiness” (בְּהַדְרֵי־קִדְשׁ), seems to be the key. In order to understand this phrase, two questions must be answered. First, does this phrase modify the first half of the verse or the second? In other words, are the people in “the ornaments of holiness,” or is it the king that possesses the “majesty of holiness”? Second, should one take הַדְרֵי in a spiritual sense (majesty or glory), or in a physical sense (ornaments

⁴⁹ A correlative verb in this case a verb that would show causation by the subject.

⁵⁰ The substantive verb expresses existence, such as the singular “is,” the plural “are,” or the infinitive “to be.”

⁵¹ The reflexive use identifies the subject and the direct object as having an identical referent.

⁵² A reflexive use of the same verbal root can be found in 2 Chronicles 29: 14, 17, and with reference to military duties in Judges 5:2, 9 and 2 Chronicles 17:16. The concept of presenting yourself as a free-will offering is also found in Romans 12:1 and Philippians 2:17. The idea of giving oneself to the Lord is also found in 2 Corinthians 8:5.

or decorations)? The way one answers the second question determines how one answers the first.

Searching the Scriptures for precedents is, in this case at least, unfruitful. This phrase is found, in addition to the passage under investigation, in Psalm 29:2; 1 Chronicles 16:29; and 2 Chronicles 20:21. In each case the NIV translates the phrase “the splendor of his holiness.” Only in Psalm 110:3 does the NIV break this pattern, by translating the phrase “in holy array.” Still, even with this variation, the phrase is consistently used to describe God himself. In contrast, the NASB routinely translates this phrase as “in holy array,” or “in holy attire.” Adding to this confusion is the fact that the NASB consistently uses this phrase to describe those who worship the LORD, except in this passage, where they punctuate the sentence so that this phrase is modifying the second clause. Clearly the definition of this phrase and the one being modified by it remain in doubt.

If the phrase *בְּהַרְרֵי־קֹדֶשׁ* is best translated as “the splendor of his holiness,” so that it describes the character of the king, then those loyal to the king appear to be offering themselves as willing combatants in the military campaign being waged. Of all the royal psalms, this would be the first and only instance of potential activity on their part other than prayer or praise. This being said, even though they offer themselves as willing soldiers, there is no evidence that these troops are actually deployed in combat. Nor is there any need for their assistance because it is the LORD who is crushing the rulers of this earth and heaping up the dead. Thus, this interpretation is consistent with the rest of the psalms under study.

If, on the other hand, the phrase *בְּהַרְרֵי־קֹדֶשׁ* is best translated “in holy attire” and modifies those who are loyal to the king, then it seems best to take this as a reference to sacerdotal garments, with those wearing them performing the function of priests. The garments of the

priest are specifically called “garments of holiness” (בְּגָדֵי־קֹדֶשׁ) in Leviticus 16:4. This interpretation would indicate that, when the ultimate king (Jesus Christ) is installed at the beginning of the kingdom, those loyal to him—who will be primarily from the nation of Israel—will finally be serving the purpose for which God called them. They will indeed be a “kingdom of priests” (מִמְלֶכֶת כֹּהֲנִים) (Ex 19:6). While this function is broader in scope than has been seen formerly in that it would include leading organized worship, it is still in line with the limited activities previously assigned: prayer and praise.

In either case, it remains clear that the role of those loyal to the king is limited to worship. No activity is required on their part to bring justice to this world or to suppress those who remain in violent opposition to the LORD and his anointed one.

Psalm 132

Psalm 132 easily divides into two stanzas. The first (vss 1-9) recalls David’s zeal for finding a dwelling place for the ark of God. The second (vss 10-18) is the prayer of one in the Davidic line requesting the LORD God not to forget the promises he made to David and to his house.

Stanza one mentions three of the four actors common to the royal psalms. The LORD and David are prominent in these verses as David brings the ark to “your resting place” (מְנוּחָתְךָ) in Jerusalem. Those loyal to the king—referred to as “your priests” (כֹּהֲנֶיךָ) and “your pious ones” (חֲסִידֶיךָ)—rejoice in this action.

The irony inherent in the Davidic Covenant is played out in stanza two. While David was seeking a resting place for the LORD, the LORD, in turn, establishes a place for David’s offspring to “sit” (יָשְׁבוּ) “forever and ever” (עַד־עַד).

As has been seen in previous psalms, there is an identification between the LORD and his anointed one in stanza two. The LORD states that he will place one David's offspring on his (David's) throne forever and ever (vss 11-12). Yet at the same time, the LORD also states that he will sit at his resting place forever and ever "because I have desired it" (כִּי אֶחְתִּיקָהּ) (vs 14). This "resting" is not merely an habitation, however, because the LORD takes upon himself an active role in the well-being of the people. He will bless Zion with abundant provisions (אֶבְרַךְ צִיּוֹן וְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִשְׂרָאֵל) and will satisfy the needy with bread (אֶבְרַךְ צִיּוֹן וְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִשְׂרָאֵל). Nevertheless, the LORD causes a "horn for David" (אֶבְרַךְ צִיּוֹן וְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִשְׂרָאֵל) and for him will cause to flourish a crown (וְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִשְׂרָאֵל).

It is only in the last verse that one see a reference to "his enemies" (אֶבְרַךְ צִיּוֹן וְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִשְׂרָאֵל). That this mention is so brief seems to be significant. If one didn't know that the last verse of the psalm was written, the entire song could be read without noticing any significant loss. In other words, one could cut verse 18 from the psalm and have no clue that it was missing. This seems to indicate that a mention of "enemies" is a necessary component to this type of psalm. If this is true, then understanding and acknowledging the existence of enemies to the LORD and his anointed one is crucial to understanding the world as it currently exists plus what will be necessary for the LORD to establish the reign of David's offspring.

Psalm 144

Psalm 144 is somewhat unique in that the first two-thirds of it are quotes from other psalms. Put another way, the only new material is found in vss 12-15. This being said, these quotations were arranged in a particular order so that the author could express his intended meaning, so they shouldn't merely be dismissed.

David begins this psalm with a note of praise to “the LORD my rock” (יְהוָה צוּרִי). He then continues with praise, piling on descriptor after descriptor in his attempt to enumerate what God has done for him. He has “trained my hands for battle” (הִמְלִמְךָ יָדַי לְקָרֶב) and “my fingers for war” (אֶצְבָּעוֹתַי לְמִלְחָמָה). He is “my lovingkindness and my fortress” (חֶסְדִּי וּמְצוּדָתִי), “my stronghold and the one who delivers me” (מְשֻׁנְבֵי וּמַפְלְטִי), “my shield and the one in whom I take refuge” (מִגְנֵי וּבוֹ חֹסֵיתִי). He is the “one who subdues peoples under me” (הַרְוֹדֵר עַמֵּי תַחְתָּי).

Knowing these things to be true of the LORD causes David to see himself and all mankind as they really are: “like a breath” (לְהַבֵּל דָּמָה) or “a passing shadow” (כְּצֵל עוֹבֵר). It is because God is who he is and man is what he is that David confidently calls upon him to rescue him from “the hands of the sons of foreigners” (מִיַּד בְּנֵי נֹכְרִים). In other word, David realizes his own helplessness in the face of danger as well as the impotence of all mankind to stand opposed to God.

Three of the four characters have been mentioned in the quoted section of this psalm. David is the author and thus the one uttering the praise. He is also mentioned by name in vs 10. The LORD is the main actor, being described in his personality and as the object of David’s petitions. The enemies of David are described as ones whose mouths speak vanity (דְּבַר־שָׁוְא) and whose right hands deceive (וּמִיְמִינָם יָמִין שֶׁקֶר) (vs 8).

The new material describes the blessings that come upon those “whose God is the LORD” (הָעַם שֶׁיְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו). The promise of healthy children (vs 12), abundant food (vss 13-14), and domestic tranquility (vs 14) belong to those who follow him. It is important to notice that the people are the recipients of these blessings even though no actions are ascribed to them other than trust in the LORD.

Evaluating Gunkel's list

This brief review seems to have established the validity of Gunkel's classification. What is important to note, however, is that higher critical methods and assumptions are not necessary to arrive at this conclusion. A simple reading of the texts in question in a normal, every-day, socially-designated fashion is sufficient to verify the shared characteristics of the collection.

These shared characteristics are important because they exclude as well as include. Put another way, the three major actors and the chorus being present in every psalm under consideration provides workable boundaries to help establish what may be considered a royal psalm. For example, each of the psalms in Bullock's list of messianic psalms which speak of the man and his life generally (8, 16, 22, 35, 40, 41, 55, 69, 102, 109)⁵³ fail to meet these qualifications. While there is little doubt that these are indeed messianic psalms, in most cases they portray the coming one in his suffering rather than in his glory as king.

One possible addition to Gunkel's list may be Psalm 61 as it does meet many of the qualifications mentioned above. There is a prayer raising up to God (אֱלֹהִים vs 1) for protection against the enemy (אֹיֵב vs 3). The king (vs 6) is said to dwell in the presence of God forever (יָרֵאֵי שְׁמֶךָ vs 7). There is even mention of those who fear your name (יָרֵאֵי שְׁמֶךָ vs 7).

Despite these qualifications, the psalm doesn't quite raise to the level of the other psalms in this study. God (אֱלֹהִים) is addressed, but the LORD (יְהוָה) is not. This is not automatically disqualifying as this is also true of Psalm 45. Yet in Psalm 45, there is an exegetical explanation for the change in address which is lacking here. Additionally, while there is the promise of the king dwelling in the presence of God forever, there is no mention of God actually placing him on the throne. This would make this psalm unusual in this category. Finally, the chorus is there

⁵³ Bullock, An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books: Revised and Expanded, 137.

but, like Schrödinger's cat, is not there. The first person singular pronoun is used to the exclusion of the first person plural pronoun. Much like Mrs. Grundy,⁵⁴ the chorus is mentioned, but remains off-stage and mute.

While these differences may seem minor, in the list assembled by Gunkel the characters act with a uniformity that is not replicated here. Therefore, one must conclude that this psalm should not be classified as a royal psalm.

THEOLOGICAL AND PRACTICAL INFERENCES

The consistency with which the royal psalms recount the relationship between the four characters enables the interpreter to draw several theological and practical truths.

The Nature of the World's Governments

The fact that the mention of enemies is a requisite for inclusion in this classification is evidence that evil exists and often prospers. This should surprise no one. What makes teaching of the royal psalms unique is that this evil is specifically applied to the governments of this world. Even though the governments that exist have been established by God (Rom 13:1-5), they are continuously taking their stand together against the LORD and his anointed one (Ps 2:2). As a result, those loyal to the Davidic king should recognize that, while they owe

⁵⁴ Mrs. Grundy is a fictional character from the play *Speed the Plough* (1798) by Thomas Morton. In the play, Mrs. Grundy is often referenced, but never seen. Her main role is to show the tyranny of conventional propriety, as one of the lead characters—Dame Ashfield—is heard asking “What will Mrs. Grundy think?” or “What will Mrs. Grundy say?” at every turn of events.

obedience to government in its role as a minister of God, the government they serve is in open rebellion and hostility towards their true sovereign. Thus, patriotic nationalism has no place in the worship of God.

The people that follow the LORD and his anointed one must often endure the oppression of the lawless because of the wickedness of the world system and its governments.

The Perpetuity of the Davidic Covenant

When the LORD established his covenant with David, he made provisions for punishing the wickedness of the human heart that would manifest itself within the royal line. Nevertheless, the Davidic Covenant is a perpetual covenant that will establish one of David's sons upon the throne of Israel and even the entire world forever. Psalm 89 makes clear that no transgression perpetrated by the Davidic dynasty would be enough to abrogate the covenant.

The Re-establishment of the Kingdom

The Kingdom is consistently portrayed in the royal psalms as a single unit, not a series of parts. When the ultimate king is placed upon the throne, his kingdom is the natural extension of the covenant that God cut with David and his offspring. Thus, there are not two kingdoms, but one. The re-establishment of the Kingdom will not be an event that is entirely new, but will be a rebuilding of what has already been. These psalms make clear that there will be certain changes that will take place. Nevertheless, those changes are what should be expected when the king reigns in perfect righteousness.

Since this king will reign in perfect righteousness, he will be the champion of the oppressed. Those loyal to the king will ultimately receive the vindication and blessings of his reign, even though they were forced to endure the oppressor's aggression for a time.

The re-establishment of the Kingdom will only be accomplished by the power of the LORD and not by human effort. Those loyal to the king perform no actions that help establish the king's reign. Instead, it is through violent, devastating, and overwhelming military conquest that the LORD puts down the governments of this world (which remain consistent in their rebellion against the LORD and his anointed one) so that the Kingdom may be inaugurated. Until this military campaign is completed, the king remains a king in waiting (Ps 110:1).

The Nature of the Ultimate King

Even though the right to reign flows through the generations of David's offspring, it remains clear that one special king will appear. He will be different than the ones that preceded him. David himself calls this son "Lord" (Ps 110:1). His rule will encompass the whole earth and will continue forever and ever.

Amazingly, these psalms teach that the LORD and his anointed one are the same, yet distinct (Ps 45:6-7). He is God himself and yet serves God in some mysterious way that foreshadows the teachings of the New Testament but is left unexplained in these songs.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, of course, these psalms speak to the future reign of our Lord Jesus. They teach of his divine nature, his human descent, his perfect righteousness, and the extent of his rule. These songs provide hope to the oppressed by reminding them of a future day when the LORD overthrows the wicked governments of this world, establishes his king on the throne, and

pours out his blessings on the earth. Understanding and applying their teachings enables those currently loyal to the king to live in a world hostile to him by looking to the future when all the LORD's promises to David are fulfilled.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alexander, J. A. *The Psalms*. [n.p.], 1850. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.
- Allen, Leslie C. *Psalms 101-150 Word Biblical Commentary*, Edited by David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker. Waco: Word, 1983.
- Anderson, Bernhard W. *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today*. rev. and expanded ed. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983.
- Bellinger, W. H. *Psalms: Reading and Studying the Book of Praises*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1990.
- Broyles, Craig C. *Psalms New International Biblical Commentary*. Old Testament Series 11. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999.
- Bullock, C. Hassell. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books: Revised and Expanded*. Chicago: Moody, 1988.
- . *Encountering the Book of Psalms : A Literary and Theological Introduction* Encountering Biblical Studies. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001.
- Futato, Mark David, and David M. Howard. *Interpreting the Psalms: An Exegetical Handbook*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007.
- Gunkel, Hermann, and Joachim Begrich. *Einleitung in Die Psalmen*. 2. ed. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1966.
- Hasel, Gerhard F. *Old Testament Theology : Basic Issues in the Current Debate*. 4th ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.
- Kidner, Derek. *Psalms 73-150 : A Commentary on Books Iii-V of the Psalms* The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975.
- Leupold, H. C. *Exposition of the Psalms*. Columbus, Ohio,: Wartburg Press, 1959.

- Merrill, Eugene H. *Kingdom of Priests : A History of Old Testament Israel*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996.
- _____. *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*. Ed. Roy B. Zuck. Chicago: Moody Press, 1991.
- Murray, John "Systematic Theology—II," *Westminster Theological Journal*, 26. November 1963.
- Paul, M. J. "The Order of Melchizedek (Ps 110:4 and Heb 7:3)." *Westminster Theological Journal* 49 (1987).
- Perowne, John James Stewart. *Commentary on the Psalms*. London,: G. Bell and sons,, 1878-1879. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1989.
- Ryken, Leland, Jim Wilhoit, Tremper Longman, Colin Duriez, Douglas Penney, and Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of biblical imagery*. Downers Grove, Ill.:InterVarsity, 1998.
- VanGemeren, Willem A. "Psalms." In *The Expositor's Bible Comentary with the New International Version of the Holy Bible*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelein, 5, 3-880. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991.
- Westermann, Claus. *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*. Atlanta: John Knox, 1981.