



KIDNER
CLASSIC COMMENTARIES



PSALMS
1-72



DEREK KIDNER



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Publisher's preface

The Old Testament commentaries of Derek Kidner (1913–2008) have been a standard for a generation. His work has been a model of conciseness, clarity and insight.

Kidner had a long career in both the church and the academy in England. After studying piano at the Royal College of Music, he prepared for the ministry at Cambridge University, where his musical interests found an outlet in performing in concerts of the Cambridge University Musical Society. He was then curate of St. Nicholas, Sevenoaks, south of London, before becoming Vicar of Felsted in Essex. After that he became a senior tutor at Oak Hill Theological College where he stayed for thirteen years. Kidner finished his career by serving as warden of Tyndale House in Cambridge from 1964 to 1978.

The year 1964 also marked the beginning of his writing career when his commentary on Proverbs was published. His ninth and final book, *The Message of Jeremiah*, was published in 1987. Those who read his books find in them the marks of both professor and pastor with his even-handed scholarship as well as his devotional insight. These qualities have made his commentaries in the Tyndale Old Testament Commentary series and The Bible Speaks Today series some of the most beloved and popular of recent decades.

As the commentaries in these two series have aged, the originating publisher, Inter-Varsity Press in England, began producing more up-to-date replacements which we at InterVarsity Press in the United States have been happy to publish as well. But knowing the honored place Kidner's work has had in the lives of so many students, teachers, lay people and pastors, we made the decision to keep his original volumes alive, but now as part of the Kidner Classic Commentaries. So we proudly and gladly offer these here for future generations to read, absorb and appreciate.

CHIEF ABBREVIATIONS

- Anderson *The Book of Psalms* by A. A. Anderson (*New Century Bible*, Oliphants), 1972.
- ANET *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* by J. B. Pritchard, ²1955.
- AV English Authorized Version (King James), 1611.
- BASOR *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*.
- BDB *Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament* by F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs, 1907.
- BH *Biblia Hebraica* edited by R. Kittel and P. Kahle, ⁷1951.
- Bib. *Biblica*.
- Briggs *Psalms* by C. A. and E. G. Briggs; (*International Critical Commentary*, T. & T. Clark), 1906–07.
- Childs *Memory and Tradition in Israel* by B. S. Childs (*SBT* 37, SCM Press), 1962.
- Dahood *Psalms* by M. J. Dahood; (*Anchor Bible*, Doubleday), 1966–70.
- Delitzsch *Psalms* by F. Delitzsch, ⁴1883.
- Eaton *Psalms* by J. H. Eaton (*Torch Bible Commentaries*, SCM Press), 1967.
- ET *Expository Times*.
- EV English versions.
- Gelineau *The Psalms: A New Translation* arranged for singing to the psalmody of Joseph Gelineau (Fontana), 1963.
- G-K *Hebrew Grammar* by W. Gesenius, edited by E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, ²1910.

- HTR* *Harvard Theological Review.*
- HUCA* *Hebrew Union College Annual.*
- JB Jerusalem Bible, 1966.
- JBL* *Journal of Biblical Literature.*
- JSS* *Journal of Semitic Studies.*
- JTS* *Journal of Theological Studies.*
- K-B. *Lexicon in Vetus Testamenti Libros* by L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, 1953.
- Keet *A Study of the Psalms of Ascents* by C. C. Keet (Mitre), 1969.
- Kirkpatrick *Psalms* by A. F. Kirkpatrick (*Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, CUP), 1891–1901.
- Kissane *Psalms* by E. J. Kissane (Browne and Nolan), 1953–54.
- LXX The Septuagint (pre-Christian Greek version of the Old Testament).
- mg. margin.
- Mowinckel *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* by S. Mowinckel; (Blackwell), 1962.
- MT Massoretic Text.
- NBC* *The New Bible Commentary Revised* edited by D. Guthrie, J. A. Motyer, A. M. Stibbs and D. J. Wiseman (IVP), 1970.
- NBD* The New Bible Dictionary edited by J. D. Douglas et al. (IVP), 1962.
- NEB The New English Bible, 1970.
- OTS* *Oudtestamentische Studiën.*
- PBV Prayer Book Version, 1662.
- Perowne *The Psalms* by J. S. Perowne (G. Bell), 1864.
- RP The Revised Psalter (SPCK), 1964.
- RSV American Revised Standard Version, 1952.
- RV English Revised Version, 1881.
- SBT* *Studies in Biblical Theology* (SCM Press).
- Syr. The Peshitta (Syriac version of the Old Testament).
- Targ. The Targum (Aramaic version of the Old Testament).
- TB* *Tyndale Bulletin.*
- TEV Today's English Version: the Psalms, 1970.

<i>TRP</i>	<i>The Text of the Revised Psalter</i> . Notes by D. W. Thomas (SPCK), 1963.
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i> .
Vulg.	The Vulgate (Jerome's Latin version of the Bible).
Weiser	<i>Psalms</i> by A. Weiser (<i>Old Testament Library</i> , SCM Press), 1962.
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i> .

INTRODUCTION

1. Hebrew poetry

The Old Testament repeatedly breaks out into poetry. Even its narratives are graced here and there with a couplet or a longer sequence of verse to make some memorable point (cf. e.g. Gen. 2 – 4 in any modern version), and its prophecies predominantly take this form. While the Psalms are the main body of poems in Scripture, and were given (with Job and Proverbs) a distinctive system of accents by the Massorettes¹ to mark the fact, they are themselves surrounded by poetry and rooted in a long and popular poetic tradition.

By its suppleness of form, Hebrew poetry lent itself well to this widespread use. A proverbial saying, a riddle, an orator's appeal, a

1. These were the Jewish custodians of the text c. 500–1000 AD. The Massoretic Text, abbreviated here as MT, is the standard Hebrew text of the Old Testament. For further details see *NBD*, article 'Text and Versions', I, II.

prayer, a thanksgiving, to mention only a few varieties of speech, could all slip into its rhythms almost effortlessly, for its metre was not parcelled out in ‘feet’ or in a prescribed arrangement of strong and weak syllables, but heard in the sound of, say, three or four stresses in a short sentence or phrase, matched by an answering line of about the same length. The lighter syllables interspersed with the stronger were of no fixed number, and the tally of strong beats in a line could itself be varied with some freedom within a single poem. There was room and to spare for spontaneity.

A hint of these rhythms can be felt at times even in translation, when our words happen to correspond roughly with the Hebrew. In the latter, while there are sometimes lines of two stresses, or of four or even more, the commonest rhythm is 3:3, which comes through in, e.g., the RSV of Psalm 26:2,

Próve me, O Lórd, and trý me;
tést my héart and my mínd.

The next psalm to this, Psalm 27, is mostly in a 3:2 rhythm, which again has left its mark on the translation. E.g. in verse 1,

The Lórd is my líght and my salvátion;
whóm shall I féar?

This pattern of 3:2 is often referred to as *qíná* (lament), because its falling cadence, with its suggestion of finality, made it a favourite measure for elegies (as in the book of Lamentations) and for taunt-songs (e.g. Isa. 14:12ff.); but this finality could equally express joy and confidence, as Psalm 27 fully demonstrates.

The flexibility found within the single line of verse extends to the larger units as well. What we have called a couplet (or, in Albright’s term, a bicolon) can build up at times to the higher climax of a triplet, or tricolon, as in Psalm 92:9, (Heb. 10):

For, lo, thy enemies, O Lord,
for, lo, thy enemies shall perish;
all evildoers shall be scattered.²

2. The victory songs of Moses and Deborah have some stirring examples

Similarly in the poem as a whole it is the exception rather than the rule to find stanzas of equal length or even of any clear definition. Sometimes, to be sure, a refrain will map out a distinct design, as in Psalms 42 – 43 where this is carried through with some intricacy, and sometimes an acrostic will create its own framework (most elaborately in Ps. 119); but mostly the movement of the thought is free to form whatever pattern it most naturally would adopt.

But the fundamental characteristic of this poetry was not its external forms or rhythms, but its way of matching or echoing one thought with another. This has been described as thought-rhyme, but more often as ‘parallelism’, a term introduced by Bishop Robert Lowth in the eighteenth century.³ It is recognizable at once in such a couplet as Psalm 103:10, where the two lines are synonymous:

He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor requite us according to our iniquities.

In this form of parallelism the second line (or sometimes a second verse) simply reinforces the first, so that its content is enriched and the total effect becomes spacious and impressive. The nuances of difference between the synonyms should not be over-pressed; they are in double harness rather than in competition. So, e.g., ‘man’ and

of this (e.g. Exod. 15:8, 11; Judg. 5:21), and it was a feature of early Canaanite poetry. See W. F. Albright, *Yabweh and the Gods of Canaan* (Athlone Press, 1968), pp. 4ff. An Ugaritic hymn to Baal contains lines almost identical with Ps. 92:9, above.

3. See Lecture XIX in his *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, first published in Latin in 1753. Lowth’s analysis still commands wide respect, although further refinements have been suggested (see the next footnote) and the appeal of plain repetition, as well as parallelism, in early poetry has been emphasized by the literature discovered at Ugarit. For some recent modifications and criticisms of Lowth’s categories, see S. Gevirtz, *Patterns in the Early Poetry of Israel* (Chicago University Press, 1963); and W. Whallon, *Formula, Character, and Context* (Harvard University Press, 1969).

‘the son of man’ in Psalm 8:4, or ‘my soul’ and ‘my flesh’ in 63:1, are paired rather than contrasted.

Synonyms alone, however, would be tedious, and the form has many variations. The ‘climactic parallelism’ of e.g. Psalm 93:3, or of 92:9 quoted above, shows the powerful effect of letting the second line, like a second wave, mount higher than the first, perhaps to be outstripped in turn by a third. In various other ways the regularity of the matching lines can be modified, so that the second, for instance, enlarges on a single feature of the first, as in 145:18 –

The Lord is near to all who call upon him,
to all who call upon him in truth

– or else perhaps is its complement or counterpart, as in 63:8, rather than its echo:

My soul clings to thee;
thy right hand upholds me.

This last example has something in common with Lowth’s second category, ‘antithetic parallelism’, on which less needs to be said. It is most familiar to us from the sayings of Proverbs 10ff., and most characteristic of the didactic psalms; e.g. 37:21

The wicked borrows, and cannot pay back,
but the righteous is generous and gives.

To these two classes, synonymous and antithetic, Lowth added a third, which he named ‘synthetic or constructive parallelism’, where ‘the sentences answer to each other ... merely by the form of construction’. He assigned to this category everything which fell outside the first two groups, and in this he has been followed by various modern exponents (subject in most cases to the addition of one or two sub-categories).⁴ But some of Lowth’s most telling examples

4. E.g. Briggs (pp. xxxivff.) gives specimens of (a) ‘emblematic’ parallelism, where the synonyms grow elaborate, as in 129:5–8;

might well be classed as virtually synonymous parallels (e.g. Pss 19:7ff.; 63:11a), and for the rest it would seem better to discard the term 'parallelism' and merely speak of couplets or bicola, in the many cases where the thought and diction move straight on in the second line of a pair, without a backward glance.

A final point deserves emphasis, and this too was one of Lowth's observations. It is the striking fact that this type of poetry loses less than perhaps any other in the process of translation. In many literatures the appeal of a poem lies chiefly in verbal felicities and associations, or in metrical subtleties, which tend to fail of their effect even in a related language. The programme-notes of any *Lieder* recital are enough to prove the point! But the poetry of the Psalms has a broad simplicity of rhythm and imagery which survives transplanting into almost any soil. Above all, the fact that its parallelisms are those of sense rather than of sound allows it to reproduce its chief effects with very little loss of either force or beauty. It is well fitted by God's providence to invite 'all the earth' to 'sing the glory of his name'.

2. The structure of the Psalter

Most modern versions mark out the division of the Psalter into its five 'books', which respectively begin at Psalms 1, 42, 73, 90 and 107. The basis of this is to be found in the Psalter itself, which crowns each of these groups with a doxology. The Septuagint (abbreviated as LXX), translated in the third or second century BC, witnesses to the antiquity of these landmarks, and earlier still the Chronicler quotes the one which concludes Book IV (1 Chr. 16:35f.).⁵

There are other pointers beside these to the components of the collection and to the stages of its growth. One of the most

(b) 'stairlike' (cf. the climactic parallelism referred to above, but embracing also the more gradual progression from key-word to key-word in, e.g. 25:1-7); (c) 'introverted', following the chiasmic pattern a.b.b'.a'. (as in 30:8-10, where 8 corresponds to 10, and 9a to 9b).

5. For a different interpretation of the significance of this, see Mowinkel, II, pp. 193ff.

noticeable is the postscript to Book II: ‘The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended’ (72:20). This at once raises the question why eighteen further psalms of David should be found after this point, and a dozen psalms by other authors before it; to which the most likely answer is that a self-contained compilation once ended here, to which other psalm-books, with their own selections of material, were later added. But within the unit itself (1 – 72) there are signs that the two books which compose it were used at first independently of one another. For example, two psalms in Book II (53 and 70) are almost exact duplicates of material in Book I; also in Book II the term Elohim (God) largely replaces the name Yahweh (the Lord) – a difference of customary religious language which is comparable to the preferences and aversions found in our own circles, where one group tends to speak of ‘God’ and another of ‘the Lord’, or one generation uses ‘Thou’ in worship and another ‘You’. Just as the wording of a hymn will vary a little from one collection to another, to suit the needs of different Christian groups, so, it seems, did the wording of the psalms, leaving traces of the little collections which were eventually brought together for the use of all Israel. The differing use of divine names continues as between blocks of material in the remaining psalms, in that Elohim tends to predominate in 73 – 83, but Yahweh in the rest of Book III, i.e. in 84 – 89; after which, in Books IV and V, Yahweh is used almost without variation.⁶ No doubt some of these distinctions reflect the personal preferences of the authors; but others are evidently editorial, adapting an existing psalm to the language of its users. E.g. in Psalms 84f., 87f., of Book III, which come from the same group of temple singers as 42 – 49 in Book II, the preference of Book II for ‘Elohim’ has disappeared.

We have mentioned ‘blocks of material’, and these provide some further glimpses of the history of the Psalter. Book II opens with

6. S. R. Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (T. & T. Clark, 1896), p. 371, gives the following statistics: Bk I, Yahweh 272, Elohim (unqualified) 15; Bk II, E 164, Y 30; Bk III, Pss 73 – 83, E 36, Y 13; Pss 84 – 69, Y 31, E 7; Bk IV, Y only; Bk V, Y only (except in 144:9; also in Ps. 108 which is drawn from Pss 57 and 60).

a group of psalms (42 – 49) attributed to the sons of Korah, a hereditary guild of temple officials. Book III, as we have seen, contains four more of their psalms, but they are preceded by psalms of Asaph (73 – 83),⁷ a musician who was founder of another of the temple guilds. These two bodies of musicians, then, each had their special stock of material. But among the collected psalms of David, Asaph and Korah (and including three Davidic psalms from Bk V) we find fifty-five which are earmarked for ‘the choirmaster’ (if that is the right translation⁸). This suggests that at some stage the overall director of temple music had his own compilation, a forerunner of the complete Psalter or a specialized selection from it.

Books IV and V have some other clusters, mostly linked by their subjects or uses rather than their authorship. Such are 93 – 100, on the world-wide kingship of the Lord; 113 – 118, the ‘Egyptian Hallel’ (‘praise’) sung on Passover night; 120 – 134, ‘Songs of Ascents’ (i.e. of pilgrimage⁹) which were part of the ‘Great Hallel’, 120 – 136; and a final Hallel consisting of 146 – 150 which all begin and end with Hallelujah. There are also two sets of Davidic psalms, 108 – 110 and 138 – 145.

Last of all, perhaps, the collection was prefaced by Psalm I, which has no title or author’s name, unlike most of the psalms in Book I.

The picture that emerges is a mixture of order and informality of arrangement, which invites but also defeats the attempt to account for every detail of its final form. There is some chronological progression, with David most in evidence in the first half, and a clear allusion to the captivity towards the close of Book V (Ps. 137). But David reappears in the next psalm (138), and by contrast, the fall of Jerusalem has been lamented as far back as Psalm 74. Progress of theological or cultic thought is no easier to demonstrate. While

7. The Asaph group has a solitary forerunner in Bk II, i.e. Ps. 50. Ewald was perhaps the first to point out that by transferring 42 – 50 to follow 72, the psalms of David, Korah (first group) and Asaph would come in straight sequence.

8. See p. 55.

9. See p. 58.

there has been no lack of theories, which tend to reflect the thought-forms of successive ages (e.g. Gregory of Nyssa saw in the five books five steps to moral perfection, somewhat as Athanasius interpreted the fifteen Psalms of Ascent; in a different vein Delitzsch found a series of catchwords linking one psalm to the next throughout the 150), any scheme which discovers a logical necessity in the position of every psalm probably throws more light on the subtlety of its proponent than on the pattern of the Psalter. Its structure is perhaps best compared with that of a cathedral built and perfected over a matter of centuries, in a harmonious variety of styles, rather than a palace displaying the formal symmetry of a single and all-embracing plan.

3. Some trends in the modern study of the Psalms

Few areas of the Old Testament have proved more fascinating to scholars in recent years than the Psalms. After Wellhausen, critical opinion had seemed likely to remain agreed that the Psalter was a product of Israel's post-exilic maturity, when the teaching of the prophets and the collapse of the monarchy had combined to give new prominence to individual piety. As late as 1922 John Skinner could speak of Jeremiah as in some sense 'the first of the psalmists',¹⁰ in that his unheeded prophecy had driven him to wrestle with God and discover in the process the realm of personal communion. The office of a prophet was soon to disappear, along with the establishment which it had criticized and exhorted; soon a new kind of voice would be heard, addressing God rather than man, and 'a new spiritual type – the Old Testament saint'¹¹ – would come into view with the poets of the Psalter.

But a fresh approach to psalm studies had been pioneered by H. Gunkel as far back as 1904, which was to force a reappraisal of the provenance and function of the psalms, which other scholars would carry far beyond the originator's first thoughts. Gunkel's method was first to seek out the living context of the psalms, looking into the

10. J. Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion* (CUP, 1922), p. 222.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 223.

songs and poems to be found elsewhere in the Bible and in contemporary cultures; and secondly to classify the material by its form rather than its content, somewhat after the botanizing method of Linnaeus (an analogy which Gunkel himself employed¹²). One of the points that emerged from this was the close similarity of the Psalter's main types of material to the hymns, laments, thanksgivings, prayers, and pieces for royal occasions, which arose out of the various situations found in the rest of the Old Testament. Gunkel concluded that 'this poetry, which belongs to worship, is as old as worship itself, and springs from the same age as the national saga, justice, the Torah, and all other treasures of the national life'.¹³ Jeremiah therefore (to return to Skinner's example), so far from being the originator of the psalm of personal supplication, was taking up and developing a form that was already well established.¹⁴

For all this, Gunkel still considered that most of the material in the Psalter was post-exilic, but written still in the idiom created by the old rituals, although they were outgrown and religion had 'come of age' – for this celebrated metaphor was his, a generation before it was Bonhoeffer's. It was the conservatism of religious habit, he considered, which left the stamp of the old cultic patterns on the new spiritual material, so that the private suppliant used language that had been designed to serve the king, or spoke of his troubles and their cure as if they were the assaults of sickness and the rites of expiation.

It was Mowinckel, in his series of monographs, *Psalmen-studien, I–VI* (1921–24), who carried this line of study nearer to its true conclusion, by refusing the artificiality of detaching the psalms from the rituals that had supposedly shaped them. Gunkel, he pointed out, had shared the prejudice of his age against cultic religion, and so had

12. Cf. H. Gunkel, *The Psalms* (Facet Books, B.S. 19, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1967), p. 5, footnote. This is a translation by T. Horner of Gunkel's article on the Psalms in *Religion im Geschichte und Gegenwart* (1909; 21930).

13. 'The Poetry of the Psalter', in *Old Testament Essays*, ed. D. C. Simpson (Griffin, London, 1927), p. 136.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

stopped halfway along the path he had opened up. We must accept what the psalms imply, and not only see them as, in the main, ‘real cult psalms composed for . . . the actual services in the Temple’,¹⁵ but ‘must try to form as complete and vivid a picture as possible of the old Israelite and Jewish cult and its many situations and acts’.¹⁶ Psalms and liturgy must illuminate each other.

One startling result of this approach was the re-dating of the psalms. Their golden age was now held to be the monarchy, even if it was still too much to ascribe more than one or two to David himself. Even more notable, however, was the emergence of a new picture of Israelite worship, constructed not so much from the data of the laws (which Mowinckel considered ‘one-sided and fragmentary’) as from ‘hints’, as he puts it, ‘in the psalms themselves’,¹⁷ with supporting evidence from other oriental cults.

Following this lead, different scholars have discerned different festivals as the major sources of the psalms. Mowinckel himself saw the feast of Ingathering and Tabernacles, at the turn of the year, as the chief of these, celebrating God’s epiphany and enthronement with a ritual so elaborate that it gave rise to more than forty psalms. Here the drama of creation was enacted, with a ritual battle against the sea and its monsters (cf. e.g. Ps. 89:9f.), like the battles in Canaanite and Babylonian myths. In due course Yahweh, his presence symbolized by the ark, would ascend Mount Zion in procession, there to be challenged, admitted (24:7ff.) and finally acclaimed with the cry, ‘The Lord has become king!’ (e.g. 93:1). As king, he would confirm his covenant with Israel and the house of David, admonish them to keep his laws (81:8ff.; 95:8ff.), and, like Marduk fixing the fate of the coming year, he would ‘judge the world with righteousness’ (96:13); in other words he would set events on their right course and assign to the nations their destinies.

All this activity was, in Mowinckel’s view, concerned with the here and now, not the distant future. Annually this great day, the Day of the Lord, would be looked to as the time of restoring all things in

15. Mowinckel, I, p. xxiii.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

readiness for the coming year; but gradually these hopes, unfulfilled, would be projected to a future age. So, out of this very festival, Israel's eschatology was brought to birth.

Reactions to Mowinckel have varied, predictably enough, between an eagerness which would outrun him in his own direction, and a cautious appraisal which would question or modify much of his position. But on the whole he has won considerable acceptance: every commentator must reckon with him, and if the first question now asked about a given psalm tends to be Gunkel's enquiry as to the group in which to place it, the second is likely to be Mowinckel's, namely, 'to which cultic occasion must this psalm group have belonged, and what has the congregation experienced or felt on that occasion?'¹⁸

A rather exaggerated response to the new methods came from a British group of scholars who came to be known as the Myth and Ritual school (from the title of a symposium edited in 1933 by S. H. Hooke), and from a number of Scandinavians, notably Engnell and Widengren, who assiduously pursued the idea of a cultic pattern common to the ancient Near-East. Scarcely a feature of the Babylonian *akitu* festival or of Canaanite fertility rites failed to betray to them its presence in the psalms. Not content with Mowinckel's suggestion that Yahweh inherited the Jebusite cultus of 'Elyon the Most High, some scholars convinced themselves that he celebrated an annual marriage with Anath¹⁹ and a ritual death and resurrection like that of Tammuz,²⁰ in all of which his part was acted by the king. This was not only the view of the Scandinavians Widengren and Hvidberg; T. H. Robinson expressed it (in an imperturbably matter-of-fact style) in the words: 'The divine marriage followed, consummated in the sacred hut, and this was succeeded by the death of Jahweh. After a period of lamentation he was restored to life, and, with his consort, was led to his home in the Temple, there to reign

18. Mowinckel, I, p. 32. For criticisms of his approach, see below, p. 27-32; 60f.

19. T. H. Robinson, 'Hebrew Myths', in *Myth and Ritual*, ed. S. H. Hooke (Oxford, 1933), pp. 185f.

20. Cf. G. Widengren in *Myth, Ritual and Kingship*, ed. S. H. Hooke (Oxford, 1958), pp. 190ff.

until the changes of the year brought back again the festal season.²¹

Other scholars, with a stronger appreciation of Yahweh as the living God, saw the king's role as playing the part not of Yahweh himself but of his adopted son, and reconstructed the cultic drama as a double sequence of conflict and victory: first the Creator's quelling of his cosmic foes, to reassert his kingship and renew the earth; then the Davidic king's struggle with the kings of the earth and the power of death, in which he was humiliated and all but engulfed (cf. 18:4f.), to be rescued in the nick of time.

An attractive feature of this approach was its liberation of the Psalter from its association with ecclesiastical decorum. To picture a cultic drama of battles, processions and homage-shouts is at least to find the psalms coming alive with some of the colour and excitement which are implied in their allusions to clapping and lamenting, dancing and prostration. In an imaginative reconstruction of the New Year festival, for instance, one writer pictures the gradual extinguishing of the torches, the divesting of the king of his royal attire, and, with the onset of total darkness, the king lying prostrate at the feet of his enemies, where he cries out to Yahweh the words of Psalm 89: *How long, O Lord? Wilt thou hide thyself for ever? ... Remember, O Lord, how thy servant is scorned ...* 'At last, when the atmosphere has become almost unbearable in its intensity, Yahweh *does* come to deliver his people. He comes at dawn, symbolized by the sun, the supreme source of light and life, and is victorious ...'²²

This is gripping and memorable, even if it raises the question, How are we to know whether any of it happened this way?

We will return to this: but meanwhile we can note a second attraction of this cult-dramatic conception. It brought together certain Old Testament themes which might otherwise have seemed unrelated or arbitrary. For one thing, it bridged the gulf between the king and the suffering Servant. Here was one way of seeing the two offices united meaningfully in one person. For another, its presentation of the king as 'sacral', a unique mediator between God and

21. *Myth and Ritual*, pp. 188f.

22. D. Anders-Richards, *The Drama of the Psalms* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1968), p. 41.

his people, of whom he was (on this view) the embodiment and representative, made a context for Messianic prophecy. If the king's anointing made him a person apart, with a crucial role to fulfil in relation to God and man, some of the exalted Messianic titles would begin to appear less violently inappropriate to the Messiah's predecessors, even though they were still too magnificent to fit any king in his own person.

But this very concept of sacral kingship is precarious, and has come under attack from many quarters. It is doubtful whether it would have suggested itself to biblical scholars from the bare scriptural evidence without the prompting of comparative anthropology.²³ This is at best a dubious source, as C. R. North implied when he criticized Mowinckel's method of 'working inwards from the wide circle of a primitive and general Semitic *Umwelt*, instead of outwards from the centre of the prophetic consciousness';²⁴ and in this particular area even the idea of a common Near-Eastern pattern of kingship or of worship is contradicted by the evidence, as several scholars have pointed out.

By itself, the biblical material shows two aspects of the king, with a certain tension between them which the theory of sacral kingship resolves too easily. On the one hand various royal psalms (in particular Pss 2, 45, 110) use language for the king which gives him a seemingly divine status as God's 'son' (2:7) or even as God incarnate (45:6, lit.); and in the narratives his person is sacred, as the Lord's Anointed. There were also times when he presided as priest (cf. 2 Sam. 6:12ff.; 1 Kgs 8). On the other hand there is no description of the king's supposed combat and deliverance at an annual festival, on which so much of his people's welfare is alleged to have hung. And it is surely significant, as M. Noth points out,²⁵ that in Israel

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23. Cf. Widengren's remarks on the influence of Frazer on the Myth and Ritual School, and of Grönbech on Pedersen and Mowinckel. See *Myth, Ritual and Kingship*, pp. 152, 154.
24. *ZAW* 50 (1932), p. 35, cited by A. R. Johnson in *Myth, Ritual and Kingship*, p. 224.
25. M. Noth, 'God, King and Nation', in *The Laws in the Pentateuch, and Other Essays* (English Edition, Oliver & Boyd, 1966), pp. 161ff.

kingship arrived only late on the scene, and aroused mixed feelings among the faithful when it did. The king's known activities as priest, referred to above, belonged to quite exceptional occasions; he was warned away from any assumption of a general right to this area (1 Sam. 13:8ff.; 2 Chr. 26:18).

We can hardly do better than follow the New Testament's handling of this paradox, which is not to play down either side of it (e.g. by emending the texts or easing the translations), but to let it push us towards the unique solution it was to receive in Jesus Christ. Several passages treat it in this way. One is our Lord's pressing of the paradox of Psalm 110: David's Lord, David's son; another is Peter's use of the same oracle and of Psalm 16, to contrast the incorruption and the heavenly throne of which David spoke with the tomb which he himself was to occupy; yet another is the string of testimonies from the psalms in Hebrews 1, familiar to many as the Epistle for Christmas Day, where full value is given to such expressions as 'Thou art my Son' and 'Thy throne, O God, is for ever'.²⁶ This involves, to be sure, a frankly supernaturalist view of these oracles; but it is hard to see why it should be thought improper for the Holy Spirit to inspire prophecies on the central subject of all revelation.

We have been looking at the more extreme followers – or, in some cases, out-distancers – of Mowinckel. At the other extreme there are those who disagree with him entirely, or at certain crucial points. An example of the latter is R. de Vaux, who returns a decided negative to the question, 'Was there a New Year Feast (in Old Testament times)?' and a 'No' – or at the least 'Not Proven' – to the question, 'Was there a feast of the Enthronement of Yahweh?' He agrees with those who find it a serious objection that no connection between the kingship of Yahweh and the Feast of Tabernacles is found explicitly in Scripture (the one exception that is claimed, Zech. 14:16, he dismisses as fortuitous, since the whole chapter is about Yahweh's coming reign). The cry, *Yahweh mālak*, in Psalm 93:1, etc. is simply a loyal acclamation, 'The Lord is King'; it is not a formula

26. This subject is treated more fully in Section 4, below, pp. 32ff. ('The Messianic Hope').

of enthronement. The psalms which contain it are psalms in praise of Yahweh's reign, not announcements of his accession.²⁷ As for the Day of the Lord, which to Mowinckel meant originally the day of the same festival, de Vaux agrees with those who, like von Rad, see it as a battle-day, since war, not divine kingship, is the invariable context of the Day of the Lord in the Old Testament.²⁸

Among commentators, some have followed Mowinckel's example in treating one festival as the pre-eminent influence, but have identified it differently. H.-J. Kraus argues for a feast that celebrated the choice of Zion and the house of David, but not (until after the exile) the enthronement of Yahweh.²⁹ And A. Weiser regards a festival of the Covenant as the seed-bed of almost the entire Psalter. Weiser's position is hailed by Mowinckel as broadly in agreement with his own, although Weiser himself would not concur with this, since he regards History and Law as the twin pillars of the covenant-renewal.³⁰ But since the whole scheme of salvation was enacted in the festal week, as Weiser sees it, there is inevitably much common ground between him and Mowinckel.

More important than these agreements and disagreements, however, is the concept of *actualization* which is bound up with the cultic understanding of the psalms. The cult-drama, it is held, was far more than a teaching aid. It brought the events it enacted into the present moment. In a religion dominated by magic this would have implied an automatic unleashing of power for good or ill, but in the religion of the Old Testament it confronted the worshipper with God and his acts, inviting an immediate response of faith. The Exodus and Sinai, cultically re-lived, were no longer buried in the past; they became for the believer his own salvation and his own glimpse of the theophany. 'I have seen thee in the sanctuary.' God

27. R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961), pp. 502–506.

28. R. de Vaux, op. cit., p. 264; G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, II (Oliver & Boyd, 1965), p. 123n.

29. Mowinckel discusses Kraus's theory of this in *The Psalms In Israel's Worship*, II, pp. 23of.

30. Weiser, p. 32.

could address the present congregation, not merely refer to their forefathers, as those who have ‘made a covenant with me by sacrifice’ (50:5); and in the enthronement ritual (for Weiser accepts this, even with its postulated Babylonian background) the cry ‘The Lord is become King’ embraces, as he puts it, ‘the whole past, however remote, and includes the consummation of the Kingdom of God at the end of time’.³¹

Yet as soon as one asks in what sense the Exodus deliverance was experienced by the worshipper in a later age, one is confronted by the once-for-all finality of that event. It could only be re-experienced either by analogy (as when a man might view some present predicament as the equivalent of Israel’s plight in Egypt) or else by a sense of continuity, in that one was an inheritor of the salvation which began its course at the Red Sea. But this act of mental translation destroys the immediacy which is implied to be the essence of a cultic event. Only in this somewhat oblique sense does it seem proper to speak of ‘actualization’ in the Israelite cult. Even so, it had an important part to play in emphasizing the fact that God is not the God of the dead but of the living, and that his acts have ‘the dynamic characteristic’ (as Brevard S. Childs has put it) ‘of refusing to be relegated to the past’.³² This is expressed with Hebraic directness when Moses says to the new generation at the end of the forty years in the wilderness, ‘Not with our fathers did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive this day’ (Deut. 5:3). Yet that very setting, in the wilderness, should warn us against taking the vivid language with wooden literalism. It was one way of confronting the new generation with the continuing covenant and with the living God; but it was not the only way. The same point could be made by quite other means: not by telescoping past and present but by holding them firmly apart. This is the method of Psalm 95, which deals with the same set of events. The ‘today’ of this passage is set in contrast to ‘the day at Massah’; the present scene in contrast to ‘the wilderness’; the present generation in contrast to the one that put God to the proof.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 618.

32. Childs, p. 88.