

Four Historical Psalms: Brueggemann's Rhetoric in Historical and Liturgical Garb

Walter Brueggemann's 1984 publication of *The Message of the Psalms*¹ began a new era of scholarly discussion of the Book of Psalms in the Hebrew Bible. One can safely posit that not since the work of Gunkel or Mowinckel has one study of the Hebrew psalter so impacted the field.² Although a lengthy summary of Brueggemann's work is unnecessary, a brief review of Brueggemann's theory will begin this study.

Brueggemann argued that the Psalms can be "roughly grouped" around three general themes: orientation, disorientation, and new orientation. His desire was to correlate the critical psalm study of Gunkel and Westermann with the realities of human life. To this end, he argued that the psalms can be ordered around these themes both in canonical context and in practice. The psalms of orientation reflect the "*seasons of well-being* that evoke gratitude for the constancy of blessing." These psalms articulate joy in the "reliability of God, God's creation, and God's governing law." Psalms of disorientation, on the other hand, reflect "anguished seasons of hurt, alienation, suffering and death," evoking "rage, resentment, self-pity, and hatred." The psalms of new orientation express the "surprise when we are overwhelmed with the new gifts of God, when joy breaks through the despair." The three-fold rubric represents the human experience, which is also echoed in the practice of the psalms. Two decisive movements

¹Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984). The theory was originally expounded by Brueggemann in "Psalms and the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 17 (June 1980): 3-32. Brueggemann discusses the relative importance of Gunkel, Mowinckel, and Westermann, 18.

complete Brueggemann's rubric—from orientation to disorientation and from disorientation to new orientation. Of course, one does not stay in new orientation, but eventually moves from new orientation into old orientation, one that is taken for granted.³

The move is somewhat cyclical, although John Goldingay correctly pointed out that the movement functions more as a spiral than a cycle, since one never moves back to the original state of orientation.⁴ This paper will investigate Psalms 78, 106, 105, and 136 within Brueggemann's rubric of orientation, disorientation, and new orientation, placing the four psalms in a context within the rubric. The first task will be to investigate the setting, form, and purpose of the four psalms.

Four "Historical Psalms"⁵

Psalms 78, 105, 106, and 136 are included in a group of psalms that scholars sometimes call "historical psalms," often including Psalm 135 as well.⁶ Svend Holm-Nielsen astutely noted

²With apologies to Kraus, Westermann, or other scholars in the field.

³Brueggemann, *Message*, 19-20.

⁴John Goldingay, "The Dynamic Cycle of Praise and Prayer in the Psalms," *Journal for the Study of Old Testament* 20 (1981): 85-88. Brueggemann responded affirmatively to Goldingay's comments, "Response to John Goldingay's 'The Dynamic Cycle of Praise and Prayer,'" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 20 (1981): 141.

⁵Much of the work on this section of the paper is an adaptation of the author's doctoral dissertation, "A Critical Analysis and Evaluation of Gerhard von Rad's 'Short Historical Creed,'" New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (1989), 114-180.

⁶F. N. Jasper, "Early Israelite Traditions and the Psalter," *Vetus Testamentum* 17 (Jan., 1967): 50-51, points out that psalms 44, 47, 61, 68, 77, 78, 80, 81, 99, 105, 106, 108, 114, 135, and 136 contain a recognizable link to the traditions of Israel's origins, only 78, 105, 106, 135, and 136 contain an attempt to give a chronological and consecutive record of the events. Bernard W. Anderson, *Out of the Depths* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), 38-40, called these Psalms "salvation-history psalms." Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, trans. Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 236, and E. Beaucamp, *Le Psautier*, vol. 2, *Ps. 73-150*, in *Sources Bibliques*, ed. J. Gabalda (Paris: Librairie LeCoffre, 1979), 32, limited the historical psalms to 78, 105, and 106; Leopold Sabourin, *The Psalms: Their Origin and Meaning*, Vol. 2 (Staten Island, NY: The Society of St. Paul, 1969), 295-297, to Psalms 78 and 105.

that, while he categorized the psalms as “historical psalms,” they could not be placed “together in one lump.”⁷ The historical traditions of Israel were used in the psalms for different purposes, therefore these psalms are difficult to classify form-critically. Viewing these psalms from a distinct direction, in his seminal “Short Historical Creed” essay, Gerhard von Rad called them “free adaptations of the creed in cult lyrics.”⁸ He argued that the early credal statements of Israel were expanded in liturgical usage, reflected in the historical psalms. A brief study of the individual psalms will precede the application of Brueggemann’s rubric to the psalms.

Psalm 78

Psalm 78 is a celebration of the orientation found in the early Judahite monarchy, using Derek Kidner’s title for the psalm, “From Zoan to Zion.”⁹ The psalm traces the history of Israel from Egypt to Jerusalem, from captivity to monarchy. Beyond these general obvious traits, this much-debated psalm eludes consensus, either form-critically or historically. As Samuel Terrien commented, “Psalm 78 is perhaps unique in the hymnology of ancient Israel.”¹⁰

⁷Svend Holm-Nielsen, “The Exodus Traditions in Psalm 105,” *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute* 11 (1978): 24-25, 27.

⁸Von Rad’s “free adaptations” include 1 Sam 12:8; Psalm 136; Ex 15:4, 5, 8, 9, 10a, 12-16; Psalm 105; Psalm 78; Psalm 135; Nehemiah 9; and Psalm 106. See von Rad, “The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch,” in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, trans. E. W. Trueman Dicken (London: SCM Press, 1966), 7-13; reprint in *From Genesis to Chronicles: Explorations in Old Testament Theology*, Fortress Classics in Biblical Studies (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005).

⁹Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150: A Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1975), 280.

¹⁰Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 564. Terrien was primarily discussing the form-critical matters of the psalm, but the same comment is relevant for the date as well.

Scholars have debated both the form and the date of origin for Psalm 78. Psalm 78 has been dated to the tenth century,¹¹ the tenth or ninth century,¹² the early monarchy,¹³ the eighth century,¹⁴ the late monarchy,¹⁵ and the exilic or post-exilic period. The latter date is primarily due to the deuteronomic language that is assumed to be exilic or post-exilic.¹⁶ The deuteronomic characteristics¹⁷ in the psalm probably preclude the tenth-eighth centuries. If the deuteronomic language is seen as prototypical, then an eighth century date would be acceptable. The

¹¹Otto Eissfeldt, *Das Lied Moses Deuteronomium 32:1-43 und das Lehrgedicht Asaphs Ps 78 samt einer Analyse der Umgebung der Mose-Liedes* (Berlin: Akademie, 1958), 42-43; W. F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (London: University of London, 1968; reprint, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns), 17, 155. Campbell, 72-77, followed Eissfeldt, but he argued that verses 5-8, 10, 37, 56a, and 58 were Deuteronomistic additions.

¹²D. N. Freedman, "Divine Names and Titles in Early Hebrew Poetry," in *Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy: Studies in Early Hebrew Poetry* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1980), 103, 118; D. A. Robertson, *Linguistic Evidence in Dating Early Hebrew Poetry* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1972), 155. See also G. Ernest Wright, "The Lawsuit of God: A Form-Critical Study of Deuteronomy 32," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, ed. B. W. Anderson and Walter Harrelson, 26-67 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), 38-39.

¹³Dahood, vol. 2, 238; John Day, "Pre-Deuteronomic Allusions to the Covenant in Hosea and Psalm LXXVIII," *Vetus Testamentum* 36 (1986): 9-10.

¹⁴James L. Mays, *Psalms*, Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989), 249; Philip Stern, "The Eighth Century Dating of Psalm 78 Re-argued," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 66 (1995): 41-65; Archie Lee, "The Context and Function of the Plagues Tradition in Psalm 78," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 48 (1990): 83-89.

¹⁵Terrien, 569; A. A. Anderson, *Psalms*, New Century Bible, vol. 2 (London: Oliphants, 1972), 562; Wallace I. Wolverson, "Sermons in the Psalms," *Canadian Journal of Theology* 10 (1964): 176; Beaucamp, 32-33; Artur Weiser, *Psalms*, trans. Herbert Harwell, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 541; J. A. Sanders, *Torah and Canon*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 20; David Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant: Transformations of Genre in the Growth of Biblical Literature* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 47.

¹⁶Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150*, A Continental Commentary, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 124; Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51-100*, Hermeneia, ed. Klaus Baltzer, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 290-293; S. Mowinckel, *Psalms in Israel's Worship*, vol. 2, trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 111; W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Psalms* (London: SPCK, 1959), 359. Jasper, 59, suggested that the psalm was used in an earlier form in the pre-exilic cult, but he dated the present psalm to the later period.

establishment of a firm date remains an enigma, but a pre-exilic date can be confirmed. The psalm is a product of the Judahite monarchy, celebrating God's election of David and Jerusalem.

Psalm 78 has been categorized form-critically as a wisdom psalm,¹⁸ a hymn,¹⁹ an exhortation,²⁰ a liturgical sermon,²¹ and a combination of forms. The difficulty of assigning a form-critical category to Psalm 78 stems from the nature of the psalm itself and of the group of historical psalms of which it is a part. The psalm has clear wisdom characteristics. Many scholars have noted its didactic nature.²² The psalm begins with characteristic wisdom language, "Give ear, my people, (to) my instruction." This didactic tone continues into verse two, where the psalmist's message is described with the terms **מִשְׁלַּח** and **חִידָה**. The term **מִשְׁלַּח**, usually

¹⁷For some of these deuteronomistic characteristics, see tables in Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 320-365. He also pointed out, however, "deuteronomistic prototypes" in Psalm 78 and Hosea.

¹⁸H. Gunkel and J. Begrich, *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, trans. J. D. Nogalski (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 247; W. H. Bellinger, *Psalms: Reading and Studying the Book of Praises* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 130; Mowinckel, *Psalms*, 112; O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. P. R. Ackroyd (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), 125.

¹⁹Georg Fohrer and Ernst Sellin, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, trans. David Green (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), 264-270; Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, in *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. D. A. Hubbard, et al., vol. 21 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 40, 224, 231; F. C. Fensham, "Neh. 9 and Pss. 105, 106, 135 and 136: Post-Exilic Historical Traditions in Poetic Form," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 9 (1981): 37-9.

²⁰John Goldingay, *Psalms Volume 2: Psalms 42-89*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 479.

²¹Wolverton, 166-176. See also Weiser, 538-539; Aage Bentzen, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2d ed. (Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gad, 1955), 160.

²²Phillip McMillion, "Psalm 78: Teaching the Next Generation," *Restoration Quarterly* 43, no 4 (2001): 220; Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 59; Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms*, ed. W. F. Albright and D. N. Freedman, vol. 17 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1968), 238; R. P. Carroll, "Psalm LXXVIII: Vestiges of a Tribal Polemic," *Vetus Testamentum* (1971): 9; A. F. Campbell, "Psalm 78: A Contribution to the Theology of Tenth Century Israel," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 41 (1979): 51; C. A. and E. G. Briggs, *The Book of Psalms*, vol. 2,

translated “parable,” signifies “a comparison.” The term refers to a proverb or saying in which some deeper meaning lies, to be gleaned by means of a hidden comparison.²³ The term **חֵידָה**, “riddle,” refers to a test of wisdom. It can be a sacred secret or an account of God’s mysterious workings in the past.²⁴ Using these two words together, the psalmist gives the impression of a desire to convey a special insight, an understanding of particular importance.²⁵ The question that remains is, “What is the insight being conveyed?”

The Psalm provides an interpretation of the choice of Judah and Jerusalem as the center of Yahweh's people. Through the history recited in Psalm 78, the hand of Yahweh can be traced from the past sanctuary at Shiloh to the choice of Judah, Mt. Zion, and David. The psalm is usually viewed as a validation of Judah as Yahweh’s people, or an invalidation of Ephraim's claim as the chosen people. Carroll called Psalm 78 a “charter myth,” making Judah the rightful heir to the Exodus tradition, which makes up the major part of the psalm.²⁶ According to Campbell, legitimization of the regime is a consequence rather than an intention of the theological history.²⁷ Brueggemann, while calling Psalm 78 a legitimization of Jerusalem in contrast to the rejection of Shiloh, stated that in the psalm “Israel is called by Yahweh into a *new*

The International Critical Commentary, ed. S. R. Driver, et al (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1907), 178; Mowinckel, *Psalms*, vol. 2, 112. Fohrer, *Introduction*, 264-270.

²³McMillion, 221-222; Dahood, vol. 2, 239. See also Anderson, vol. 1, 375.

²⁴ Anderson, Vol. 2, 563.

²⁵Campbell, 53.

²⁶ Carroll, 147-150. He based his argument on the theory that Judah was not an original participant in the exodus event. Therefore, legitimacy as heir to the tradition became important when that tribe became the ruling tribe.

²⁷Campbell, 77. See G. E. Wright, “The Conquest Theme in the Bible,” in *A Light Unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Jacob M. Myers*, ed. H. N. Bream, et al, 509-518 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), 511.

political possibility.”²⁸ This “political possibility” was embodied in the orientation of Judah and Jerusalem. While interpreters may view Psalm 78 as propaganda, legitimization, censure, or instruction, the psalm is actually a celebration of the monarchy of Judah. While none of the former representations are technically incorrect, they miss the point of the psalm in the end.

Psalm 78 is an explanation of the history, given to instruct the present generation, rather than a legitimization of Judah's leadership; however, the focus of the psalm in the end is the present, not the past. Kraus quotes Eichhorn, “In its present shape, Psalm 78 is an impressive didactic poem which, selecting and combining and joining traditions already available and firmly established, lets actualized salvific deeds and the Torah of Yahweh be understood as a present comfort and entitlement.”²⁹ This quote of Eichhorn resembles Brueggemann’s description of the theology of orientation. In a lecture presented in Houston, Brueggemann stated that orientation is “land theology by the propertied class,” a “nurturing socializing process,” and an affirmation that “life is not normless.”³⁰ These two descriptions contain the same emphases: entitlement = propertied class, comfort = socializing process, and Torah = norms. These three also parallel the primary form-critical categories that Brueggemann includes in the Psalms of Orientation.

Brueggemann argues that the three primary forms making up the Psalms of Orientation are creation, wisdom, and torah psalms.³¹ Only verse 69 presents a creation theology, stating that God established the earth. However, Psalm 78 exhibits wisdom and torah themes in many places, as already suggested. The Israel of the past displayed a lying mouth and a disloyal heart (vv. 36-

²⁸Walter Brueggemann, *Abiding Astonishment: Psalms, Modernity, and the Making of History* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 19-20.

²⁹D. Eichhorn, *Gott als Fels, Burg und Zuflucht* (Bern: Lang, 1972), 67, quoted in Kraus, 122-123.

³⁰Walter Brueggemann, “The Good Psalms, The Bad Psalms, and the Surprising Psalms” (lecture, Christ Church Cathedral, Houston, Texas, February 18-19, 2005).

³¹Brueggemann, *Message*, 25-50.

37) and refused to walk according to the torah (v. 9), in contrast to the integrity of David (v. 72).³² Interestingly, Psalm 78 does not mention Moses or Aaron, suggesting an emphasis not upon the old faithful leaders but upon David, whose descendants were on the throne, presiding over the God-given orientation.

The orientation is expressed in terms of the sure blessings of God, who chose David to rule in Jerusalem. David's integrity was the surety of the life of orientation. Following the life of wisdom and Torah guaranteed continued orientation. The description of sin and judgment serves as a motivation for continued obedience and orientation. John Eaton has described the message of Psalm 78:

Let your eyes and your heart be fixed upon him, and so you will be kept in trust and faithfulness; you yourselves will know how he cleaves the rock to give you the water of life, and sends down the bread of heaven, that you may eat, and hunger no more.³³

This is the song of orientation. In keeping with Brueggemann's rubric, Judah took the blessing of orientation for granted and made the inevitable move from orientation to disorientation, as described in Psalm 106.

Psalm 106

Psalm 106 is a psalm of exile, reflecting upon the history of disobedience that led to the present disorientation. The theme is that "Israel got what it deserved." The emphasis of Psalm 106, like Psalm 78, is on the past sins of Israel, especially the rebellions in the wilderness. The rejection of Ephraim in Psalm 78 is replaced with the rejection of the entire nation in Psalm 106.

³²Robert Cole, *The Shape and Message of Book III (Psalms 73-89)*, JSOT Supplement Series 307 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 71-72; McMillion, 228.

³³John Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary with an Introduction and New Translation* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 286.

The present generation is confessing the sins of the wilderness as the cause of their exile.³⁴ Allen concluded that the psalmist described the present experience of the exiles as punishment for a backlog of sins, which has “piled up over the centuries and been added to by each generation in turn, not excluding the contemporary one. . . . They are victims of their own and their predecessors' sins.”³⁵ Unlike Psalm 78, however, the purpose of this psalm is not to explain or celebrate a present circumstance, but to induce penitence.³⁶

Also unlike Psalm 78, something of a consensus exists concerning the date and form of Psalm 106. The date of Psalm 106 is generally accepted to be exilic³⁷ or post-exilic.³⁸ Verses 46-47 point to a date after the beginning of the exile. The inclusion of verses 1 and 47-48 in 1 Chronicles 16 requires a date before the Chronicler. The reference to the exile and the call for restoration suggest an exilic date.

Although Psalm 106 has been classified as a hymn,³⁹ liturgical sermon,⁴⁰ or wisdom psalm,⁴¹ the psalm has most often been classified as a community lament⁴² or as a penitential

³⁴George W. Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), 230-231. See Anderson, vol. 2, 743.

³⁵Allen, 53-54.

³⁶Wolverton, 172-173.

³⁷Brueggemann, *Abiding Astonishment*, 17; Terrien, 733; Allen, 52.

³⁸Kraus, 317-318; James H. Waltner, *Psalms*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2006); Anderson, vol. 2, 736; Dahood, vol. 3, 67; Fensham, 35; but cf. Weiser, 680, 682, who refused to support a late date for the psalm.

³⁹Fohrer and Sellin, 264-270; Weiser, 43; Allen, 231; Fensham, 37-9; Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 43.

⁴⁰Wolverton, 166-176. See also Weiser, 538-539; Bentzen, *Introduction*, 160.

⁴¹Mowinckel, *Psalms*, vol. 2, 112; Eissfeldt, 125.

⁴²Bellinger, 45; Gunkel, 247; Mowinckel, *Psalmenstudien*, vol. 6 (Amsterdam: P. Schippers, 1961), 31; Weiser, 679; Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, 55-64, Fensham, 38, called it a “hymnic lament.”

psalm.⁴³ The psalm should be viewed as a community lament, designed to call upon God for forgiveness. The cause of the disorientation is not from an outside force, but from guilt incurred by sin and rebellion. Brueggemann argued that this type of “internal” cause of disorientation is represented in the “Seven Psalms” of penitence.⁴⁴ Psalm 106 also reflects this disorientation.

Psalm 106 is, therefore, an exilic confession of past sins. The goal of the confession is forgiveness and restoration. Andrew Tunyogi called the recitation of negative archetypes from the past the “antecedent of salvation.” Yahweh forgave the many sins of the past and brought salvation. On the basis of God's past mercy, the present generation asks for forgiveness.⁴⁵ In his discussion of Psalm 32, Brueggemann describes the movement from paralysis in disorientation to acknowledgement and confession of responsibility to rescue and well-being, which will only come after this acknowledgement and confession.⁴⁶ Psalm 106 is analogous to Psalm 32 in this respect. Just as the movement from orientation to disorientation could have (but never would have) been anticipated, the people of Jewish exile expected a movement from the present disorientation to a new orientation.

Psalm 105

Psalms 105 and 106 rehearse the same history, but with radically different conclusions. Psalm 106 concludes with a cry for salvation, while Psalm 105 celebrates that salvation, couched in language of exodus. Psalm 105 is, therefore, a post-exilic psalm celebrating the new orientation of restoration. Brueggemann called Psalm 105 “a glad, unqualified celebration of

⁴³Claus Westermann, *The Psalms: Structure, Content and Message*, trans. Ralph D. Gehrke (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980), 45; Pius Drijvers, *The Psalms: Their Structure and Meaning* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), 119; Mowinckel, *Psalms*, vol. 2, 112.

⁴⁴Brueggemann, *Message*, 94-95.

⁴⁵Andrew Tunyogi, *The Rebellions of Israel* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1969), 114.

⁴⁶Brueggemann, *Message*, 97.

God's gracious deeds, with a particular focus on the gift of the land."⁴⁷ Based on the promise to Abraham, God has given his inheritance to the post-exilic Jews.

Scholars agreed more readily on the date and form of Psalm 105. Most scholars dated the psalm in the post-exilic period because of its alleged dependence upon the Priestly source of the Pentateuch or its use of exodus themes to describe deliverance, in the same method as Deutero-Isaiah.⁴⁸ A few scholars maintained a pre-exilic⁴⁹ or exilic date. The argument for the latter notes affinities with Deutero-Isaiah in the use of the exodus traditions. God was faithful in his promise of the land even in times when the people did not possess it.⁵⁰ The psalm should be dated in the post-exilic period. As Mays argued, the psalmist wrote after the exile because he "knew the painful story of Israel's repeated failures that is rehearsed in Psalm 78 and 106. But he also knew from the restoration of the people and the promised land about the power of the LORD to work out the covenant with the ancestors."⁵¹

Psalm 105 is usually classified as a hymn,⁵² although like Psalms 78 and 106, some have called Psalm 105 a liturgical sermon.⁵³ The psalm is a hymn of praise to the God of the covenant who has delivered his chosen people from the disorientation of exile and returned them to the

⁴⁷Brueggemann, *Abiding Astonishment*, 16.

⁴⁸J. Clinton McCann, "Psalms," *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander Keck, et al (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 1104; Kraus, 309; Waltner, 508; Allen, 41; Beaucamp, 162; Anderson, vol. 2, 726; Briggs, 342; Oesterley, 445; A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms*, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, ed. A. F. Kirkpatrick (London: Cambridge University Press, 1895), 615.

⁴⁹Weiser, 673-4. Dahood, vol. 3, 51, dated the Psalm before the exile based on its inclusion in 1 Chronicles 16. This conclusion is not warranted by its presence in Chronicles, since Chronicles dates to several centuries after the exile.

⁵⁰Richard J. Clifford, "Style and Purpose in Psalm 105," *Biblica* 60 (1979): 427. See also Holm-Nielsen, 427; A. R. Ceresko, "Poetic Analysis of Psalm 105," *Biblica* 64 (1983): 44-46.

⁵¹Mays, 339.

⁵²Gunkel, 247; Fohrer and Sellin, 264-270; Weiser, 43; Allen, 224; Fensham, 37-9; Eissfeldt, 109; Mowinckel, *Psalmstudien*, 29; Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, 122; Westermann, *Psalms*, 81, 88-90; Drijvers, 219; Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 43.

land of their inheritance. Brueggemann maintains that the hymn of praise is one of the characteristic expressions of new orientation worship.⁵⁴

While Psalm 105 contains a recital of many of the same historical events as Psalms 78 and 106, the historical presentation is different. Psalm 105 differs from Psalm 78 and 106 in its positive presentation of the historical traditions. A comparison of the plague traditions in Exodus and Psalms 78 and 105 may be instructive (See TABLE 1). Psalm 105 differs primarily from the Exodus version by placing the darkness plague at the beginning of the list. Clifford offered a plausible explanation for the placement of the darkness plague. Psalm 105 contrasts Egypt with the desert. God's first act against Egypt is the plague of darkness. His first act after the exodus is to "spread a cloud for a covering and fire to light the night" (v. 39).⁵⁵ Another explanation may be that the psalmist is contrasting the position of new orientation with the disorientation of the plague of darkness. God has removed them far from darkness.

⁵³Wolverton, 166-176. See also Weiser, 538-539.

⁵⁴Brueggemann, *Message*, 158-167.

⁵⁵Clifford, 426.

<u>Psalm 78</u>	<u>Exodus 7-12</u>	<u>Psalm 105</u>
Rivers to Blood	Nile to Blood	Darkness Waters to Blood
Swarms of Flies	Frogs	Frogs
Frogs	Gnats Swarms of Flies	Swarms of Flies Gnats
Caterpillars /Cockroaches	Cattle plague Boils	
Locusts	Hail	Hail
Hail (vines) Frost/Flood	Locusts	Locusts
Hail (cattle)	Darkness	
Thunderbolts /plagues		
Firstborn	Firstborn	Firstborn

TABLE 1—Plagues in Exodus, Psalm 78, and Psalm 105

The theme of Psalm 105 is the fulfillment of the promises made to the forefathers. Furthermore, the life of new orientation can marvel in the great promises and fulfillments of God. With this psalm, the history of Israel has moved from orientation, to disorientation, and to new orientation.

Psalm 136

Psalm 136 is a post-exilic liturgical psalm that celebrates “God’s **טֹהַר** in creation and covenant.” This psalm is a liturgical memory of the entire process of orientation, disorientation, and new orientation, signifying God’s presence throughout. The post-exilic dating of the psalm is

almost universal, and most scholars classify Psalm 136 as a hymn,⁵⁶ but some consider it to be a thanksgiving song.⁵⁷

The psalm is a liturgical memory of God's work for his people. The constituent events of the exodus and entry into the land are presented as representative of God's work on behalf of his people. To quote the recent commentary by Rozenberg and Zlotowitz, the psalmist "has in mind not just the Exodus and the Egyptian enemy, but in general Israel's various low points during its history when it faced different foes who oppressed Israel...; [The Egyptians are representative for] the nations among whom the Jews were forced to live."⁵⁸ As Brueggemann stated, "the events marked as gifts of *hesed* belong to Israel's speech and Israel's claim of reality. The affirmation of *hesed* overrides every notion of *Realpolitik*."⁵⁹ Indeed, **טֶּנֶן** is God's gift to his people in orientation, disorientation, or new orientation. In Psalm 136, God's **טֶּנֶן** is celebrated in creation, in deliverance from oppression, and in his gift of the land as an inheritance. In these three themes, the reader can observe the orientation, disorientation, and new orientation, as well as the moves between them. Thus, these four psalms place Brueggemann's rhetoric in historical and liturgical garb.

Summary and Conclusions

⁵⁶To the references in note ⁵⁰ add Anderson, vol. 2, 893; Sabourin, 205-207; Dahood, *Psalms*, vol. 3, 265.

⁵⁷E.g., Bellinger, 75.

⁵⁸Martin S. Rozenberg and Bernard M. Zlotowitz, *The Book of Psalms: A New Translation and Commentary* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1999), 868.

⁵⁹Brueggemann, *Abiding Astonishment*, 34-35.

Table 2 summarizes the arguments of this paper. Psalm 78 is a psalm of orientation. It originates in the kingdom of Judah, probably during one of the politico-religious reforms of Hezekiah or Josiah. As such, the psalmist (and future participants in the use of the psalm) celebrates God's gift of stability and prosperity in the Davidic monarchy that is firmly

<u>Psalm 78</u>	<u>Psalm 106</u>	<u>Psalm 105</u>	<u>Psalm 136</u>
8-7 th century	6th century (exile)	6-5th century (post-exile)	post-exile
"From Zoan to Zion" (Kidner, 1975, 280)	Israel got what they deserved	God's promise of the land is sure	Celebrate God's <i>chesed</i> in creation and covenant
Orientation	Disorientation	New Orientation	All three? in liturgy?

TABLE 2 Synopsis of Four Historical Psalms

established on the holy hill of Zion. Through the lengthy recitation of past rebellion against God and the resultant rejection of Ephraim, the psalm also warns of the possibility of loss of land. Psalm 106 is a psalm of disorientation, exclaimed out of the pain and doubt of the Babylonian exile. The community acknowledges the sin and rebellion of the past and cries out to God for deliverance. The faith of the lament is a powerful faith that acknowledges God's presence and care, even in the pain of absence. Psalm 105 is a psalm of new orientation celebrating God's sure promise of the land, now actualized after the exile. The promises to the patriarchs are realized

again. Psalm 136 is a litany of thanksgiving and praise to God—the God of creation, wisdom, torah, justice, and grace.

Brueggemann's monologue, *Abiding Astonishment: Psalms, Modernity, and the Making of History*, is based upon these same four psalms. The "abiding astonishment" is the response to the works of God in the past, the primary "originary" event represented in the deliverance from Egypt. He stated, "the Psalms intend to reenact the abiding astonishment of the original experience," eventuating in "*obedience, petition, gratitude, and new political possibility.*" The psalmic recitals of history seek two results:

First, they seek to make available to subsequent generations the experience and power of the initial astonishment which abides with compelling authority. They seek to do so even in a later time when such "sole Power" is less available and less sought after, when such an astonishment has less credibility. ...Second, by continuing and extending the recital beyond the originary events into monarchical history..., the recital affirms that this Yahwistic, "astonished" way of discerning Israel's present, on-going life is as valid as was the initial astonished discernment of Yahweh in the past. Thus, these Psalms affirm that Israel's present ...history is to be perceived in the same modes and categories of astonishment.⁶⁰

Through the orientation of Jerusalem's peace to the disorientation of exile to the new orientation of restoration, God's "abiding astonishment" remains. These psalms are focused upon God's works throughout history, so a closing quote about the God of the psalms is appropriate.

Brueggemann concludes *The Message of the Psalms*:

At times God is the guarantor of the old equilibrium. At other times God is a harbinger of the new justice to be established. At times also God is in the disorientation, being sovereign in ways that do not strike us as adequate.⁶¹

⁶⁰Brueggemann, *Abiding Astonishment*, 34.

⁶¹Brueggemann, *Message*, 176.