

OT 501--Old Testament Introduction

Lecture Notes—*Kethubim* (Writings)

Writings/Psalms

The Writings—

- The “tripartite” (=three part) division of the Hebrew Scriptures is found by the 2nd century, as noted in Ben Sirach’s words that his grandfather “devoted himself especially to the reading of the Law and the Prophets, and the *other books* of our ancestors” (emphasis mine). Jesus, likewise, refers to “the law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms” (Luke 24:44), where “the psalms” probably refers to “The Writings.”
- The canonical books themselves were probably settled by the 1st century AD, since the debated books were the books that became the official canon. The *Kethubim* is, however, the latest section to go through final editing.
- The canonical order of the books was not settled until much later, perhaps as late as the 12th century AD. This accounts for the widely varying order in other canonical collections (i.e. LXX). Even in modern Hebrew texts, the order of the writings can vary.¹

The Psalms—

--Nature of the Book

- The Book of Psalms is often called the “hymnbook” of the Second Temple, and probably served at least in part as the hymnbook of Solomon’s Temple as well. This points out the liturgical use of these psalms, which was probably true of most of the psalms. The student must remember that the majority of the psalms began their existence as cultic (i.e. liturgical) songs or hymns.
- Some of them do appear devotional in nature, i.e. Psalm 23. As such, these psalms do, or at least may, serve as an example of private devotional life, and certainly may be used in that way today.
- Titles and Superscriptions—
 - The many titles and superscriptions are not a part of the original psalm (i.e. they are not in poetry and stand at the head of the psalms. Some of the superscriptions differ when compared in the MT, LXX and DSS.
 - Most scholars would suggest that the superscriptions represent either the use of the psalm liturgically or the attempt of the editors to place them in context. Whether any of these are true, or they are actually the original context, we need to recognize the difficulty of assigning the psalms to specific contexts. Certainly the superscriptions do represent accurate contexts for the use of the respective psalms, even if their assignment to those contexts is deemed questionable.

¹ For example, BHS has the order of *Kethubim* as Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes and Lamentations, while the most recent JPS Hebrew/English text has the order as Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, and Ecclesiastes.

--The Book of Psalms is divided into five Books, each ending in a doxology:
Book I—1-41—All but 1 & 2 are “Psalms of David”
Book II—42-72
Book III—73-89
Book IV—90-106
Book V—107-150

--Critical Study of the Psalms

--Form-Criticism, developed primarily by Hermann Gunkel, with its recognition of literary types, is the prevailing means of organizing, studying, and interpreting the psalms in the modern scholarly world. We will look at a few of these psalm types in our study today.

--Hymns

--Psalm 96 (also called an “Enthronement song,” as a subcategory of hymn)
--96:1-3—Call to Worship the Lord
--96:4-6—Act/attributes of the Lord for which He deserves praise
--96:7-13—Concluding call to praise because He reigns as king

--Thanksgiving Songs

--Psalm 92
--92:1-3--Introductory summary and resolve to give thanks.
--92:4-14—Reason for giving thanks
--92:8--Note the chiasmic structure with v. 8 as a statement of praise at the center of the psalm. The reign of Yahweh is the central reason for praise & thanksgiving. Everything else describes His rule.
--92:15—Summary of Thanksgiving

--Complaints/Laments

--These are prayers to God, usually during time of trouble, distress, or calamity. They include both a cry for help and a proclamation of trust in the Lord.
--Psalm 42-43
—Address to God or cry for help (42:1-2, 9; 43:1)
—Description of current distress (42:3, 5a, 6-7, 10-11a; 43:5a)
—Affirmation of Trust (42:4, 5b, 8, 11b, 43:5b)
—Vow to praise and assurance of being heard (43:2-4)

--Royal/Messianic Psalms

--These psalms are related to the king in some way. There is a wedding song (Ps. 45), a battle song/prayer (Ps. 20), and perhaps coronation songs (Pss. 2, 21, 72, 110). All of these show a special connection between Yahweh and the king.
--Some of these came to be viewed as messianic in the DSS, Judaism, and the NT (i.e. Ps. 2:1f/Acts 4:25f; Ps. 45:6f/Heb. 1:8f; Ps. 110:1/Mt. 22:44/Acts 2:34f; & Ps. 110:4/Heb. 5:6, 10).
--Psalm 110
--Ps. 110:1 is the most cited or alluded to OT text in the NT (Mt. 22:44, 26:64; Mk 12:35-37, 14:62; Acts 2:34, 35; 1 Cor. 15:25; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 1 Pet. 3:22).

--Two stanzas:

--1-3—Promise to king/messiah and description of victory

--4-7—Promise to king/messiah and description of victory

--Wisdom Psalms

--These psalms display certain characteristics of Wisdom Literature.

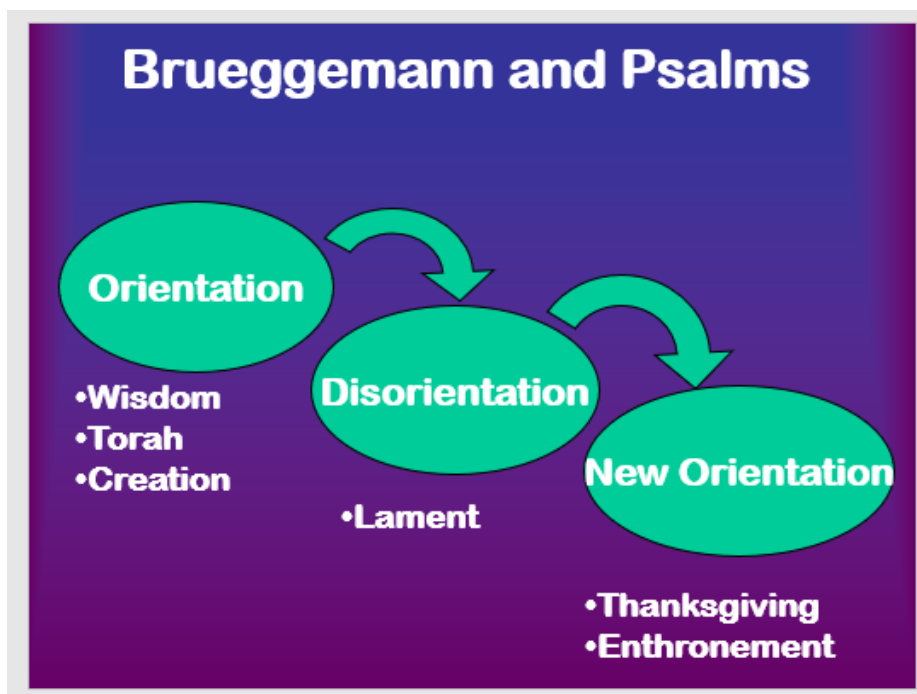
--Psalm 1

--The way of the righteous (Ps. 1:1-3). Note wisdom themes: contrast of two ways of life, delighting/meditating on the law, prosperity/blessing to righteous, and nature imagery.

--The way of the wicked (Ps. 1:4-5). The wicked man will be excluded from the righteous, i.e. God's people.

--Concluding statement of the relationship of the righteous and wicked with the Lord (Ps. 1:6).

--**Walter Brueggemann** has suggested a unique schema for understanding and studying the Psalms.² In a desire to make the Psalms relevant for pastoral care and the course of human life, he suggested that the psalms be read within a three-part schema of Orientation-Disorientation-New Orientation. The Psalms originate from human experience. Just as life is sometimes well-oriented and sometimes disoriented, so the psalms are expressions of these human experiences. As disoriented life gives way to the grace of new orientation, the psalms also speak out of and into those experiences. The following image connects Brueggemann's schema and the traditional form-critical categories.



² Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1985).