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## RECENT STUDIES ON THE PSALMS. (Presidential Address)

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## THE MEANING AND USE OF *SELAH* IN THE PSALTER

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These papers were read before the Society at its Seventh Annual Meeting at Toronto, May 2nd and 3rd, 1939. The Executive regrets that neither of the two New Testament papers read is available for publication.

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## Recent Studies on The Psalms

Forty years ago when some of us first became acquainted with Biblical studies, our interest was concentrated upon Pentateuchal criticism. The most fascinating and most important problems at that time seemed to be those connected with the critical analysis of the first five or six books of the Old Testament and the inferences as to the course of the history of Israel to be drawn from that analysis. It was impossible to escape the tremendous influence of Wellhausen. A little later we became aware that modern study had much to contribute to our understanding of the Prophets, and we read eagerly the works of Robertson Smith, T. K. Cheyne, S. R. Driver and George Adam Smith. The Prophets lived again for us. We were led to a new conception of the structure of the Prophetic books and of the function of prophecy and all the new light which was thrown upon the character and work of the Prophets was reflected in the preaching and teaching of the Church.

But modern criticism seemed at that time to have little to say about the Book of the Psalms. The analytical method did not find any full application in this sphere. We did indeed discuss the history of the formation of the Psalter and the date of particular Psalms and on this subject often came to conclusions on quite inadequate evidence and by a form of reasoning which later on we saw to be invalid. From the critical point of view the study of the Psalter lacked the interest which attached to the Pentateuch, the Prophets and some other books of the Old Testament. In the meantime the Book of the Psalms remained, as it had always been, by far the most important Book of the Old Testament for the devotional life of Jews and Christians and for the worship of the Church. In some of the Churches the whole Psalter was read or sung every month and Christian people found nothing in the writings of all their saints or scholars worthy to displace the Psalter in their worship.

The general position of the criticism of the Book of the Psalms at the opening of the present century may be fairly indicated as follows: It was recognized that the indications of date and authorship contained in the titles to the Psalms were without much, if any, historical value. They were too often in conflict with the evidence furnished by the Psalms themselves. There were a good many scholars who ascribed nearly all these poems to the period after the Babylonian Exile and not a few of them to the time of the Maccabean crisis in the second century before Christ or even later. There were numerous attempts to date the Psalms by supposed historical allusions contained in them. Some of you will recall the work, so admirable in many respects, of Duhm, Cheyne and Briggs in this field. They carried the method of ordinary literary criticism as far as it would go and yet reached no general agreement and nothing like the certainty which rewarded students in other fields of Old Testament research.

It is therefore most gratifying that during the last 25 or 30 years the study of the Psalms has become one of the most fascinating in the whole range of Biblical knowledge. This change has come about through the application to this literature of new methods, methods which have proved most fruitful. A great impetus was given to the study of the Psalter, first by the recognition of the fact that the other books of the Old Testament contain many passages of religious lyric poetry similar in form and content to the Psalms. The same is true of the Books of the Apocrypha and even of the New Testament. Secondly, the discovery and decipherment of the religious literature of Ancient Babylonia and Ancient Egypt revealed the existence of religious poetry written in the same forms as the Psalms. These discoveries made it impossible to isolate the Psalter from the religious literature of the Ancient Orient. It became as clear as day that the Hebrews had taken over as part of the cultural tradition of the world in which they lived, forms of poetry which had a long history among the great peoples who had flourished in that part of the world long before their own time. It was possible now for the first time to study the forms of religious poetry represented in the Old Testament throughout a much longer period of their development and to trace the similarities and differences in their use among the peoples of various periods and finally to appraise more adequately the contribution of the Hebrew poets in this field. Nearly all this religious poetry originated and developed in close connection with the ceremonies of the Sanctuary. If we wish to know something of the situation in which each form of religious poetry developed, we must think of the observance of the great Festivals, the offering of sacrifice, the payment of vows and other sacred ceremonial. This may be regarded as one of the most certain results of modern research. It is suggested by numerous passages in the narrative and prophetic books in which song is associated with the sacrificial worship of the Sanctuaries, "Ye shall have a song," says the prophet in Isaiah 30:29, "as in the night when a holy feast is kept; and gladness of heart as when one goeth with a pipe to come unto the mountain of the LORD, to the Rock of Israel." And the prophet Jeremiah speaks of the voice of joy and gladness like the voice of them that bring sacrifices of Thanksgiving unto the house of the LORD. (Jeremiah 33:11). It is well known that the word used for "Sacrifice of Thanksgiving" in passages like this is the same as that used elsewhere for "Song of Thanksgiving" which shows how closely the two things were associated. Amos represents God as repudiating the feasts and festivals of Israel, as refusing to accept their burnt offerings and meal offerings and he adds in the next breath "Take away from me the noise of Thy songs, for I will not bear the melody of Thy viols." It is clear that at the Sanctuaries known to him in the eighth century B.C. at such places as Bethel and Gilgal and Beersheba, the sacrifices were accompanied by Songs. There was long before the Babylonian exile a rich

development of religious lyric poetry in connection with the worship of the Sanctuaries.

It is therefore in the sacrificial worship of the people that we must look for the development of Hebrew Psalmody, remembering however that some of the earliest pieces known to us, like the Song of Miriam and the Song of Deborah, may indeed be connected with great political events and secondly, that in the later periods these forms may well have been used by poets in the composition of psalms intended not for public worship but for private edification. The material is accumulating for a comprehensive history of the development of Hebrew Psalmody and its pre-history in the religious poetry of nations much more ancient than the Hebrews.

The leader in this form of study was Hermann Gunkel. Many of us date our first real interest in the study of the Psalms from our discovery of a little book first published by him in 1904 and entitled "Ausgewählte Psalmen." Many of the scholars of the last thirty years who have given attention to these problems, admit that it was Gunkel who quickened their interest in the subject. Fortunately he lived to finish his large commentary on the Psalms in 1926, and a considerable part of his Introduction, which was completed and published by his disciple, Begrich, in 1933. Gunkel's work has been carried on by a number of other scholars who have adopted his methods without, however, always reaching his results. Among these were his distinguished contemporaries, Rudolph Kittel and Hugo Gressmann and later the Norwegian scholar, Sigmund Mowinkel, not to mention a group of his own pupils, including Hans Schmidt and Begrich.

We follow the clue already indicated, the original connection of so many forms of religious poetry with the ceremonies of the Sanctuary. The sacrifices will be accompanied most frequently by songs of praise or Hymns in which the goodness, power and wisdom of God are celebrated. Such Hymns or Songs of Praise are numerous in the Psalter and are found also elsewhere in the Old Testament. In times of great national disaster the people will assemble at the sanctuary and sing not Hymns but Songs of Lamentation, and these again are well represented in the Psalter. Sometimes in the sanctuary, there will be ceremonies of a more private or personal character. Individuals will come seeking relief from misfortunes, especially sickness. They will offer sacrifices and sometimes accompany the sacrifice with a lament. Such personal laments are very numerous on the Psalter. Some of the same persons may return on a happier day to pay their vows and sing their Songs of Thanksgiving for the mercy shown to them. Such Songs of Thanksgiving by individuals who have experienced a great deliverance are also to be found in the Psalter. They "offer the Sacrifice of Thanksgiving and declare his works *with singing*" (Psalm 107:22). These are the commonest types or forms of religious lyric.

The King has in his court Singing Men and Singing Women (2 Samuel 19:35) and it should not surprise us to find in the Psalter examples of Court poetry in which the king and his doings are dealt with. They belong to various forms or types. Another group of Psalms appear to celebrate the Kingship of Yahweh Himself and present us with a number of interesting problems.

It seems to most of us to be now beyond question that these forms and types have a long history and that they were well developed in Israel before the Exile. The Song of Miriam associated in the narrative with the destruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea, has the same pattern as the Hymns in the Psalter beginning with the characteristic second person plural of the Imperative, followed by the conjunction "for" or "because" introducing the ground of the praise.

Sing ye to Yahweh  
For He hath triumphed gloriously  
Horse and his rider  
Hath He cast in the Sea. (Exodus 15:21)

The prophet Isaiah heard the Hymn of the Ter Sanctus sung in the Temple by the Heavenly Choir:

Holy, Holy, Holy is Yahweh of Hosts,  
The whole earth is full of His Glory. (Isaiah 6:3)

The Songs of the Pre-exilic Temple in Jerusalem must have been numerous and famous for one of the later poets represents the Babylonians in the sixth century asking the captive Hebrews to sing to them one of the Songs of Zion, and that these were religious songs is clear from the reply of the captives:

"How shall we sing the LORD's song  
In a strange land?" (Psalm 137:4)

Religious lyric poetry flourished in Babylonia and in Egypt long before the settlement of the Hebrews in Canaan and it should be remembered that the Hebrews lived from the beginning of their days in an atmosphere saturated with the culture of the Babylonians, and that Canaan was dependent politically upon Egypt in a period not long before the time of Moses. Moreover the Hebrews had many contacts with Egypt, especially in the time of Solomon.

That some of the religious poetry of the pre-exilic period is in our Psalter seems to be beyond question. The whole course of recent research is most unfavourable to the view fashionable in the last generation that the Psalms are post-exilic and that many of them came from the days of the Maccabees in the second century before Christ. Psalms that refer to a reigning King can hardly be post-exilic especially in those cases where it is implied that he is of David's line. Some of the Psalms seem to come from the northern Kingdom of Israel (See Psalm 29; 81:4-5; 98:12) and should belong to the eighth century or earlier.

It may be interesting to indicate briefly some of the more important problems associated with each of the main forms or types of religious lyric represented in the Book of the Psalms.

The situation out of which the Public or National laments arose is described for us in the Book of Joel in a passage almost too familiar for quotation:

"Blow the Trumpet in Zion,  
Sanctify a Fast, call a solemn Assembly:  
Gather the people, sanctify the congregation,  
Assemble the old men,  
Gather the children,  
And those that suck the breasts,  
Let the bridegroom go forth from his chamber,  
And the bride from her closet,  
Let the priests, the ministers of the LORD  
Weep between the porch and the Altar,  
And let them say:  
Spare Thy people, O LORD,  
And give not Thy heritage to reproach  
That the nations should rule over them;  
Why should they say among the peoples,  
Where is their God." (Joel 2:15-17)

These Fasts did not occur regularly like the great Feasts. They were held when circumstances demanded them. So Jezebel commanded the elders of Naboth's city to proclaim a Fast (I Kings 21:1-9). So Jehoshaphat is said to have proclaimed a Fast when he found himself hard pressed by the Moabites and Ammonites (2 Chronicles 20:3).

The scene takes shape before our eyes. Men, women and children gather at the Sanctuary. There is bitter weeping and a pleading with God that He will remember His people and come to their aid. The assumption is that Jahweh has temporarily forsaken his people because He is angry with them. That is why the crops have failed. That is why the enemy has prevailed. That is why disaster has overwhelmed the nation. Such poems have a definite pattern. They usually begin with the appeal to God; the Divine name in the Vocative is the first word. "O God, we have heard with our ears" (Psalm 44:1). "O God, the heathen have come into Thine inheritance" (Psalm 79:1). "O Shepherd of Israel, give ear" (Psalm 80:1) "O God, keep not still silence" (Psalm 83:1). The first objective is to attract the attention of the Deity. The opening is followed by the complaint. The lamentable conditions are described and then there is the prayer for succour and relief. "Awake, why sleepest thou, O Jahweh, arise, cast us not off for ever." In these poems we are in touch with folk whose minds are filled with doubt and perplexity. What can be the matter with God that He allows such things to happen? Is He asleep? Or has He cast His people off and forgotten or repudiated His

covenant with them? At times it is suggested that the people are suffering for their sins or the sins of their forefathers. But it is not always so. Sometimes we find protestations of innocence and the suggestion that this tribulation is entirely undeserved.

“All this is come upon us,  
Yet have we not forgotten Thee,  
Nor have we been false to Thy covenant,

Nor declined our step from Thy path.” (Psalm 44:17-18)  
Poems of this form are common in the Prophets, especially the Book of Jeremiah, as well as in the Psalter. It should help us to understand them when we reconstruct the situation in which this form developed, when we conjure up before our eyes the scene in the Sanctuary on a great public Fast Day and hear the cries of a proud but sorely stricken people imploring God to deliver them and take vengeance upon their cruel foes.

But most of the laments in the Book of the Psalms are not national but personal. They represent cries of distress by individuals overwhelmed by misfortunes, however much they may have been subsequently adapted for congregational use. This seems to follow from the use of the first person singular of the pronoun. In the early years of this century the dominant view was that the Ego in these Psalms was that of the Community—the speaker is Israel or the nation—the experiences described are those of the people, not of an individual and these Psalms are therefore not personal but public laments. This view, though occasionally still advocated in a somewhat modified form, is not widely held today. It has not survived a thorough examination of these psalms and the corresponding Songs of Thanksgiving. It was based upon the view that ancient religion was group-religion, leaving but a small place for what we would call personal religion. Most of the more recent scholars decisively reject this view. The ordinary Israelite, like the Pharisee and the publican, often went up into the Temple to pray. He went to make his peace with God according to the way of his Church or to render thanks for the blessing of health restored or some other benefit vouchsafed to him.

These personal laments have raised some of the most interesting problems in Psalm-study. It is obvious that many of them reflect the experiences of sickness. That is the most common of all misfortunes. It is to be expected that such cries of distress should come very frequently from the lips of persons afflicted in this way. But sickness is not the only catastrophe which may overwhelm an individual and Hans Schmidt has urged that a good many of these laments reflect the situations of persons whose lives or liberty are in peril because they are accused of serious offences. There was perhaps a ritual of purgation in which such persons were required to maintain their innocence by an oath in the Sanctuary. We have examples of this sort of thing in the Elephantine papyri reflecting the custom of Egyptian Jews in the fifth century, B.C.

This view of Schmidt rests on the very true observation that only some of these laments are what we would call penitential. In only some of them does the poet admit his sin and pray that it may be forgiven. Others are not penitential at all but full of protestations of innocence:

“Judge me, O JAHWEH, according to my righteousness  
And to the integrity that is in me.” (Psalm 7:8)

Speaking generally, it is the Psalms of sick persons which are penitential. The prayers before judgment are those which are filled with declarations of innocence. According to Schmidt about twenty-five of these Psalms are prayers for God's help before judgment and only about twelve are left as prayers of sick persons. The connection with the Sanctuary remains because, for some offences at least, it was the place of judgment and there are hints in the Old Testament that trial by ordeal in the Sanctuary was not unknown.

Another problem which has been widely discussed is the identity of the evil doers who are often denounced in these Psalms as causing the writer's distress as well as exulting over his misfortune. Sigmund Mowinkel in the first part of his elaborate work entitled “Psalmstudien” argues that these persons are sorcerers and the writers of these Psalms believed that their sickness was due in large measure to their spells. Many of the Babylonian Psalms are directed against those who practise black magic and our attention is directed to the description of the actions of the Psalmist's foes elsewhere associated with the spells of the sorcerer such as the putting out of the tongue and the puffing of the breath (Psalms 10:5 and 12:5).

However this may be, in some of the best of these Psalms sickness is regarded as something sent by Yahweh Himself. It is He who rebukes us in His anger and chastens us in His hot displeasure (Psalm 38:1) and in the greatest specimen of this form of poetry we have the prayer: “Make me to hear of joy and gladness that the bones *which thou hast broken* may rejoice.” (Psalm 51:8)

An indication of the connection of these Psalms with the Sanctuary is the *Oracle*. Frequently in these Personal Laments we can trace the influence of an oracle or perhaps a sacrificial sign by which the worshipper is assured of Jahweh's help. That explains why so many of them end on a note of confidence. So one poet prays:

“Shew me a token or sign for good  
That they that hate me may see it and be ashamed  
Because Thou, Jahweh, has helped me and comforted me.  
(Psalm 86:17)

In Psalm 5:3 we read:

“In the morning I lay my sacrifice in order for Thee  
And look out.”

The last word is generally used of looking out for a Divine revelation (see Habakkuk 2:1) and Mowinckel's suggestion is that the correct reading and interpretation would yield the translation:

"An omen-offering I lay in order for Thee  
And look out for my sign."

The situation out of which the Personal Songs of Thanksgiving in the Psalter and elsewhere arose happens to be explained in the Psalter itself in two very well known passages. The first is in Psalm 66:13-17:

"I will come into Thy house with burnt offerings  
I will pay to Thee my vows  
Concerning which my lips opened  
And my tongue spake when I was in trouble  
Burnt offerings of fat lambs will I offer to Thee  
With incense of rams  
I will sacrifice bullocks with goats  
  
Come and hear, that I may tell you,  
All ye that fear the LORD  
What He hath done for my soul  
Unto Him I cried with my mouth  
Then was I raised up from beneath them that hate me  
I said in my heart  
The LORD will not hear  
But now the LORD hath heard  
He hath attended to the voice of my prayer  
Blessed be the LORD  
Who hath not turned away His loving kindness from me."

The second is in Psalm 116:12-13, 17-19:

"What shall I render unto the LORD  
For all His benefits toward me?  
I will raise the cup of salvation  
And call upon the name of the LORD.

\* \* \*

I will offer to Thee the sacrifice of Thanksgiving,  
And will call upon the name of the LORD.  
I will pay my vows unto the LORD,  
Yea in the presence of all His people;  
In the courts of the LORD's house,  
In the midst of Thee, O Jerusalem."

The scene takes shape before our eyes. The convalescent stands before the Altar on which his sacrifice of Thanksgiving is offered; he lifts high the cup in which is the libation or drink offering and pours it upon the Altar. And as he does so he calls to his friends and others present in the Sanctuary to listen while he tells the tale of his deliverance and to join him in thanking God who

has answered his prayers and come to his rescue. These are the circumstances which determined the pattern of this form of poetry and this pattern can be more or less fully traced in the specimens of it in the Old Testament. Here again the connection with the worship of the Sanctuary is clear, although it should be admitted that there are places where sacrifice is depreciated in comparison with the Song itself.

In the life of the King and of his court there are great occasions which are naturally celebrated in song, in very different kinds of song, of course, as the occasions differ widely from one another.

There is the day of the King's accession and coronation or the anniversary of it. There is his wedding-day when all sorts of good wishes are again appropriate. There is his birthday when like Pharaoh, King of Egypt (Genesis 40:20) he makes a feast for all his servants. There is the day on which he goes forth to battle when sacrifice must be offered (I Samuel 13:12) and prayers must be made for victory. Then there is the day on which the King returns victorious and is met by the women out of all the cities of Israel singing and dancing (I Samuel 18:6). When the King lies dead the Lament is sung. David's beautiful Lament over Saul and Jonathan (II Samuel 1:19-27) is well known. This kind of song was usually without any religious content because in early Israel the dead were supposed to have gone to Sheol with which the LORD had no concern. That is why there are no songs of this kind in the Psalter, which is a collection of religious lyric.

The Royal Palms or Court poems in the Psalter consist of Psalms 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89 in part, 101, 110, 132 and 144:1-11. They deal with various situations in the life of the King. The primary reference in them is to a reigning King of Judah or Israel. Some of the language used of the King seems to us very extravagant. How is it that he is described as God's own son by adoption (2:7; 89:26-27)? How could he live for ever (21:4; 72:5) and have dominion from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth (72:8)? How can he be a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek (110:4)? How can he be addressed as God (45:6)? The modern reader does not readily accept the conclusion that the King in these Psalms is the reigning King until he understands the role of the King in Ancient Israel.

There are many passages in the Old Testament which make us aware that the King had a mystic character. As Aubrey Johnson in his Essay on the Role of the King in the Jerusalem Cultus in the volume entitled 'The Labyrinth' puts it, "The well-being of the nation as a social unit is bound up with the life of the King." The nation as a psychic whole has its focus in the reigning monarch. If the King does not function rightly the whole nation is involved in the iniquity and must suffer accordingly. If, on the other hand, he acts rightly, then all is well with his people. So Saul's treatment of the Gibeonites brings famine upon the land (II Sam. 21). So David's offence in numbering Israel and Judah brings pestilence upon the land and "there died of the people from

Dan to Beersheba seventy thousand men" (II Sam. 24:15). It is King Ahab's desertion of the LORD that is responsible for the famine in the days of Elijah, (I Kings 17:1). The King in his sin makes Israel to sin. That is emphasized again and again in the books of the Kings. If the King is righteous, God is gracious to the people. If he is unrighteous, the people are punished with him for he cannot be separated from them. Their life is focussed in his.

It is then all-important for the people that the King should be righteous. On his righteousness or his lack of it everything depends. It is thus that we must understand the prayers of the seventy-second Psalm:

"O God, give Thy judgments to the King,  
And Thy righteousness to the King's son.  
May he rule Thy people justly,  
And (treat) Thy poor with judgment,  
So the mountains will bring peace to the people  
And the hills righteousness." (72:1-3)

Very interesting is the idea that the King cannot have such righteousness unless God gives it to him. So King Solomon in I Kings 3:9 asks for "an understanding heart to judge Thy people" (see I Kings 3:28). We may refer again to the idea that the King is inspired (filled with the spirit of God) to do what is right (see Isaiah 11:2).

Along with this idea of the representative character of the King another should be considered which is even more important. If in the sight of God he stands for the people, to the people he stands for God. He is the channel through which the Divine blessing flows to the people. He is the point in which God and people meet. Such a king ceases to be an ordinary man. Through the anointing with the sacred oil he possesses the spirit of the LORD (I Samuel 16:13). He is now the LORD's Anointed or Messiah. As such it is dangerous to lay a hand upon him. "How wast Thou not afraid," said David to the Amalekite who claimed to have slain Saul, "to put forth thine hand to destroy the LORD's Anointed"? (II Sam. 1:14)

But the King was more than the LORD's Anointed. He was the LORD's Son, not physically but by adoption.

'He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father,  
My God and the Rock of my salvation.  
Yes! I will make him my firstborn,  
Highest of the Kings of the Earth. Ps. 89:26-27.

Yet have I set My King  
Upon my holy hill of Zion

\* \* \*

Thou art my son  
This day have I begotten thee.' Ps. 2:6-7.

The King has qualities more than human. The common wish for him is that he will live for ever (I Kings 1:31; Nehemiah 2:3; Daniel 2:4; 5:10; 6:6; 6:21). So also in these Psalms 21:4 and 72:5. Of course the King is a priest for he represents the people to God. He offers the sacrifice (See I Samuel 13:9; II Samuel 6:17) and blesses the people (I Kings 8:55)

This mystic idea of the King encountered considerable criticism in the periods immediately before and after the Exile. It did not commend itself to the prophets who tended to regard the King as he really was, not as he should have been or as he claimed to be. After the Exile the Priests claimed to be the intermediaries between God and the people. If then we find this mystic idea of the King in the Psalms, it should certainly be understood as an indication of their early date.

The Royal Psalms are of various types or forms corresponding to the different situations in the life of the King. Psalms 2 and 110 are suggested by the King's accession to the Throne. The LORD Himself has set His King upon His holy hill of Zion (2:6). In both of these a Divine Oracle (2:7 and 110:1) is brought to the King in which there are promises to give nations for his inheritance, the ends of the earth for his possession (2:8) and to make his enemies a footstool for his feet (110:1). The LORD adopts the King as His son (2:7, compare 89:27) or swears that he is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (110:4). In both Psalms the King is promised a dramatic victory over all his foes. (2:9 and 110:5-6)

Psalm 20 is a Prayer before the King goes forth to battle. The scene is unmistakable. The King stands before the Altar in the Sanctuary and offers his sacrifice. No King would go into battle without offering Sacrifice. So King Saul explains to Samuel that he feared that the Philistines would open the attack at Gilgal and so he forced himself and offered the burnt offering (I Samuel 13:12). We find the same structure in Psalm 21 in which the first seven verses describe the blessings which have been showered upon the King and then follows the Oracle (verses 8-12) promising him victory over his enemies.

In Psalm 45 we are left in no doubt as to the situation. The young King is celebrating his marriage with a foreign princess (verses 9-10). At some point in the festivities the poet steps forward and recites the song which he has prepared for the occasion:

"My heart is astir with a great subject,  
I am to give utterance to what I have composed concerning  
the King,  
My tongue is as the pen of a ready writer." (Ps. 45:1)

Psalm 72:1-17 pictures the Ideal King—the Poor Man's King—in the form of a prayer or wish for the reigning monarch. We can read an exhortation between the lines. O that we had a king

who would reign like this! No wonder that in a later age this poem was understood to refer to the King-Messiah who, according to the prophets, would reign in the ideal conditions of the new Age.

In most English Versions or Translations, the Hebrew imperfections which run through this Psalm are rendered by simple futures, "He shall judge, etc." But as is pointed out in the Revised Version margin, they can be rendered as expressing a wish or prayer, "Let him judge, etc.", and that agrees much better with the Imperative in the opening verse. The Psalm is then a Song of Prayer and good wishes for the King on some great occasion—the Day of his Accession to the Throne or the Anniversary of it. What a picture of righteous rule and unlimited prosperity the poet draws! Nothing is too good for a King who governs so well. All men will wish to be his subjects and never, never will his fame be forgotten.

The idea that a king of little Judah should exercise rule over the whole world seems very strange to us. The usual explanation is that the writer is using the style of Court poetry which had its origin and development in much greater kingdoms—like that of Babylon—Kingdoms which could aspire to world government. But it should also be realized that this poet is an idealist. He passes from the realities of his time into a world of ideals. It is a dream of a ruler who fulfills the highest hopes of the human heart. The messianic interpretation, as old as the Targums, has in it an element of truth.

In Psalm 89: verses 3-4, 19-51, we find a Lament over the disaster which has overwhelmed the king. In the first part of this poem, verses 3-4, 19-37, we are reminded of the wonderful promises to David and to his seed:

"I will establish his seed for ever  
And his throne as the days of heaven."

But now (verses 38-48) the King is covered with shame and his throne has fallen to the ground. The contrast between the glowing promises to David and the deplorable conditions of the present, leads on to a remonstrance such as we often find in the Public or National Laments:

"Where are Thy ancient mercies, LORD?  
Which thou didst swear to David in Thy faithfulness  
Remember, LORD, the reproach of Thy servant,  
I bear in my bosom all the contentions of the people,  
With which Thine enemies have reproached, LORD,  
With which they have reproached the footsteps of Thine  
Anointed." (verses 49-51).

Psalm 101 seems to be what we would call a Speech from the Throne. A new king declares how he proposes to govern. We wonder if he succeeded in living up to his own ideal. The King's speech at the opening of Parliament in England is, of course, written for him by his Ministers, and probably this poem is the work of a Court poet who speaks for the King.

These Royal Psalms are frequently quoted in the New Testament: Psalm 2 in Acts 4:25-26 and 13:33; Psalm 45 in Hebrews 1:8-9; Psalm 110 in Mark 12:36, Matthew 22:44, Luke 20:42-43, Acts 2:34-35 and Hebrews 1:13.

In all these passages we have what is known as the Messianic interpretation, that is the words of the Psalms are applied to Christ. This has led to a view widely held in the Christian Church that the Psalms are in themselves Messianic, that these poets were speaking not of the reigning King of Judah or Israel but of the Divine King who would one day come to rule on earth. The Psalms are then eschatological. They describe the conditions of the last days when the Messianic King will be revealed on earth and rule in the ideal conditions so often described in the prophets, (compare e.g. Isaiah 2:2-4; 9:6-7; 11:1-9). Is this kind of interpretation entirely invalidated if we admit that these poets were thinking of the King of their own day? Must we discard it if we take the view that these psalms are filled with prayers and good wishes for monarchs who ruled in Judah and Israel?

It is clear that these poets idealized the kings with whom they had to deal. They did not flatter them as is so often done in the Babylonian poems of the same kind. But they did hold up before them an ideal of righteous government which no king of Israel or Judah realized. Who ever rules so justly and graciously as the poor man's King depicted in the seventy-second Psalm? Were the early Christian writers wrong when they said that Jesus Christ realized these ideals and that now at last a King had appeared who was all, and more than all, that these poets desired? Thus they saw in Jesus of Nazareth the realization, or if you like, the fulfilment, of all the hopes of all the ages and they did not hesitate to apply to him any ideal picture in the sacred writings of their race. Shakespeare has described the situation precisely in his Sonnet numbered 106:

"When in the chronicle of wasted time  
I see descriptions of the fairest wights,  
And beauty making beautiful old rhyme  
In praise of ladies dead and lovely knights;  
Then, in the blazon of sweet beauty's best,  
Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow,  
I see their antique pen would have express'd  
Even such a beauty as you master now.  
So all their praises are but prophecies  
Of this our time, all you prefiguring;  
And, for they look'd but with divining eyes,  
They had not skill enough your worth to sing:  
For we, which now behold these present days,  
Have eyes to wonder, but lack tongues to praise."

That completes our hasty survey of the way in which the Psalms have been interpreted in some of the best of recent literature on the subject. Enough has been said, I hope, to show that this subject has been invested with a new interest and that for any one who will give himself to it, there are rich rewards.



## The Meaning and Use of 'Selah' in the Psalter

It is curious that so little is definitely known about the word *selāh* which is a familiar feature of many Psalms. This paper suggests that a better understanding of its meaning and use may be of more than philological interest, as throwing light on the origin and use of many of the psalms themselves.

Something may be learned by observing the distribution of the term in different groups of Psalms, and by noting the points where it occurs in the text of individual compositions. In addition to three occurrences in Habakkuk 3 *selāh* is found in the Massoretic text 71 times in 39 Psalms, quite unevenly distributed as follows: 17 times in 9 of the 41 Psalms of Book I; 30 times in 17 of the 31 Psalms of Book II; 20 times in 11 of the 18 Psalms of Book III; but only 4 times in 2 of the 41 Psalms of Books IV and V together. The LXX tradition agrees closely with the Massoretic text, inserting its rendering *diapsalma* four times where it is not found in Hebrew (2:2, 34:11, 80:8, 94:15), and omitting it at the end of Psalms 3, 24 and 46; the LXX also places it correctly after 57:3 instead of in the middle of 57:4.

The correlation of psalms with *selāh* with groups bearing special titles is as follows: *selāh* occurs in 9 of the 37 (or 38) psalms of the first Davidic collection and in 28 of the 48 psalms in the Elohistie Psalter. It is found in 9 of the 11 Korahite psalms, and in 7 of the 12 Asaphite. It occurs in 28 of the 55 psalms (not including Hab. 3) with the heading usually translated "of the Director", and conversely, of the 39 psalms with *selāh*, 28 have this title. Of the 13 psalms called *Maskil*, 7 have *selāh*; of the 6 called *Miktām*, 3 have it; of the 15 called "Song" (*shîr*) 10 have *selāh*, but it does not occur in any of the 15 "Songs of Ascents" (Pss. 120-134), nor in any of the "Hallelujah" psalms. It is found in 9 of the 31 headed *Mizmôr* ("a Psalm"), but not in any of the 5 called *t'phillā* ("a Prayer"). It is found in Ps. 7, the single *shiggāiôn* ("Lament"?). It does not occur at all in any of the 34 psalms which are without title of any kind.

The most striking facts to be observed from the above are the concentration of *selāh* in the older parts of the present Psalter, and its special association with the Asaphite, Korahite and "Director's" collections. But the word is clearly an older element than any of the notes which appear in the titles. With the exception of

one occurrence of *higgāiōn* (9:17), (and probably some phrases such as 118:27b) it is the only rubric which has been included with the text in the accentual system, though it is metrically distinct.

If we now turn to Gunkel's classification by psalm-types, we find that *selāh* occurs in Book I in none of the 6 Hymns, in 2 (LXX, 3) of the Royal Psalms (Pss. 20, 21, 2), in the single Enthronement Psalm (24b), in 4 of the 16 Individual Entreaties (Pss. 3, 7, 9B, 39), in one of 5 Psalms of Trust (Ps. 4) and in one of 5 Individual Thanksgivings (Ps. 32). In Books II and III it is found in 3 of the 4 Hymns or People's Thanksgivings (Pss. 67, 68, 89A), in all of the five Songs of Zion (Pss. 46, 48, 76, 84, 87), in the one Enthronement Psalm (47), in five of the 10 People's Entreaties, in neither of the two Royal Psalms (45, 72), in 7 of the 16 Individual Entreaties, in the single Psalm of Trust (62), and in one of the 2 Individual Thanksgivings (66). The only occurrences of *selāh* in Books IV and V are in 2 of the 9 Individual Entreaties (Pss. 140, 143).

Noticeable here is the association of *selāh* to a greater degree with the Entreaties than with the Hymns or Thanksgivings. This is more evident when allowance is made for mixture of types, and for a measure of uncertainty in classification. A People's Entreaty is included within Ps. 20, a Royal Psalm, and Ps. 84, one of the Songs of Zion. One of the Psalms of Trust, Ps. 4, may also be classified as an Individual Entreaty, and the other, Ps. 62, *implies* petitionary prayer, as does one of the two Individual Thanksgivings, (Ps. 32). Of the 59 Psalms with *selāh* in the whole Psalter, 25 are, or contain, entreaties.

The next thing is to examine individual compositions to see if there is any special significance in the point in the text where *selāh* is inserted. It always occurs at the end of a verse except in 55:20 and 57:4, where it is at the end of the first line. BDB<sup>1</sup> notes four cases where it is found at the end of a Psalm, 50 "at close of strophe", 8 "where citations have been made", and 9 "where extracts might be made for liturgical purposes." Peters<sup>2</sup> says that *selāh* sometimes marks off fairly symmetrical stanzas, but more often divisions of differing liturgical motives; sometimes it clearly stands in close connection with the sacrificial act." Mowinckel<sup>3</sup> finds that, in addition to strophic and logical divisions,

(1) Brown, Driver and Briggs: *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, p. 700.

(2) Peters: *The Psalms as Liturgies*, pp. 42 ff.

(3) Mowinckel: *Psalmstudien*, IV, pp. 10 ff.

*selāh* marks points where the Psalm declares or calls for praise or testimony, and points where Yahweh's mighty acts are declared; or it follows a petition for help or for the punishment of evil-doers, or a lament over the plots of the wicked.

Peters<sup>4</sup> further illustrates from Pss. 3 and 46 the use of *selāh* at the end of some stanzas to indicate a refrain which is written out in full at the end of other symmetrical stanzas. Similar examples, perhaps less obvious, may be found in Pss. 4, 20, 57, 61, 67, 80, 82 and 84. On the other hand, the most marked refrain, the words "for his mercy endureth forever" which occurs 26 times in Ps. 136 and five times in Ps. 118, is not indicated by *selāh*, possibly because these and the other Psalms where it is found (Pss. 100:5; 106:1; 107:1) are all in Books IV and V.

The explanation of *selāh* most generally given is based on its LXX rendering *diapsalma*, itself a word of uncertain meaning but explained as indicating a change in the melody or an instrumental interlude (Suidas, *melous enallagē*; Theodoret and Hippolytus, *melous metabolē*).<sup>1</sup> The principal Jewish tradition has been that it marks a doxology. Jastrow<sup>5</sup> quotes Erub. 54a: "wherever the Biblical text has *netsah*, *selāh* or *va'ēd* it means 'forever'." Kimhi in his commentary on Ps. 3 says:<sup>6</sup> "The majority of the commentators say of the word *selāh* that it is equivalent to *l'ōlām* (forever) . . . in this sense the word is common in our (Synagogue) prayers . . . Abraham ben Ezra has interpreted that it is equivalent to *'emeth* (truth). For myself, I say . . . it is to be interpreted as having the meaning "lifting up", . . . signifying that at the point where this word is mentioned and read there was a raising of the sound of the music."

Of these three explanations given by Kimhi, the first, that *selāh* means "forever", and marks a doxology, is supported by the rendering of Aquila, *aei*; that of Quinta, *eis tous aiōnas*; that of Sexta, *diapantos*; that of the Targum, *l'olma'*, *l'olmîn*; and that of Jerome, *semper*. It is most probably the reason for the pointing of *selāh*, with the vowels of *netsah* "everlastingness", for it is generally agreed that it was originally pronounced *sōllā*, singular imperative of the verb *sālal*, (though Kittel<sup>7</sup> suggests a noun *sallā*).

The second explanation, that it means "truth," makes it equivalent to "Amen", a formula of assent in personal conversa-

(4) Op. cit., p. 41 ff.

(5) Jastrow: *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud and Midrashim*, p. 928.

(6) *The Longer Commentary of Rabbi David Kimhi*, tr. Finch, p. 22 ff.

(7) Kittel: *Die Psalmen*, K. A. T.

tion (I Ki. 1:36; Jer. 28:6) which had come into liturgical use in pre-exilic times (cf. Deut. 27:15f.). Jerome compares *selāh* with *Amen* and *Shalom*, and Jacob of Edessa says that it was a congregational response like "Amen".<sup>8</sup> It is perhaps significant that *Amen* appears in the Psalter itself only in the editorial doxologies appended to Books I-IV.

Kimhi's own view that *selāh* must be understood in the light of its derivation from *sālal* is the soundest, because it carries us back of current Jewish usage to earlier liturgical practice. *Sālal* means "to raise", "to build up" a mound or highway, (Isa. 62:10; Jer. 50:26), or "to lift up" a shout or song. The only occurrence of this verb in the Psalter has the latter sense; in Ps. 68:5 it is used in parallelism with *shîr* 'sing' and *zimmēr* "make music with the aid of instruments." As Mowinkel points out,<sup>9</sup> if *sālal* were synonymous with these words its etymology would be unknown; it must therefore be understood to have implied the object *qôl*, "voice", or something similar. (Incidentally, this throws light on the *crux interpretum* in Ps. 84:5; it is not "highways" which are in men's hearts, but songs or festal shouts).

We may infer that *selāh* marked a shout or congregational response during the liturgical recitation of the Psalms where it occurs, and that its apparent identification as a doxology in the Qere and the Versions might be due to the predominance of doxologies among the people's responses in the later form of the liturgy.<sup>10</sup> (The theory that it meant an instrumental interlude or change of melody goes back no farther than the *diapsalma* of the LXX, and may be neglected.) The cry "Hosanna—O Save!", a characteristic cult cry of entreaty, became part of a doxology at the Triumphal Entry (Mark 11:9) because it immediately preceded a doxology in the familiar words of a Hallel Psalm (118:25, 26); the original connotation had been forgotten.

On the other hand, we may be quite wrong in thinking that *netsah*, the Qere of SLH, indicated only a doxology, as distinct from other cult cries. Leslie<sup>11</sup> says that *selāh* is "the direction to the worshippers at that point in the rendition of the psalm to 'lift up' the cultic cry 'he endureth forever and ever'." But such ascriptions of praise in the Psalter always use the words *l'ôlām*, *l'ôlām wā'êd* or *l'dôr wādôr*, e.g., Pss. 9:8; 10:16; 102:13; 135:13. Only

(8) See note 1.

(9) See note 3.

(10) But see below, on *netsah*.

(11) Leslie in *Abingdon Bible Commentary*, p. 512b.

two (16:11, 68:17) of the eighteen occurrences of *netsah* or *lānetsah* in the Psalter appear in a context at all resembling a doxology; eight times it is part of an imploring cry "Why? How long? etc." (13:2; 74:1, 10 etc.) and six times it is in close connection with the imperative invocation "Arise" or "Help!" (9:19; 10:11; 44:24, etc.) In two other Psalms, it is in a similar close connection with *selāh*, apparently representing this imperative invocation (77:9, 10; 89:46, 47).

The festal shout was an important element in early Israelite worship, and continued so in the Third Temple in a more formal way (cf. Yoma 6:2, Tamid 7:3, Sukkah 4:5 and Ecclus. 50:16 ff.) The verb *rûa'* or its cognate noun *terûā* is used of the single shout of an army at the moment of onset (Ju. 7:21, 15:14), and of the greeting of a king by his people (Nu. 23:21; I Sam. 10:24). So the ark was received with united acclaim (I Sam. 4:5; II Sam. 6:15). As the ark was carried in procession up the temple hill, the trumpets sounded and the people answered with a *terûā* (here marked by *selāh*) (Ps. 47:6) Ps. 27:6 speaks of sacrifice accompanied by this shout, and singing; Ps. 33:5 of the praise of Yahweh with musical instruments and a shout; while Ps. 89:16 pronounces a blessing on those who "know the *terûā*", apparently an element in the ritual which the people must learn in order to participate. Trumpet, shout and music are heard at the New Moon festival (Ps. 81:1-3), and the People's Thanksgivings are accompanied by the festal shout (Pss. 66:1; 100:1; 95:1). II Chr. 15:11-14 describes a covenant ceremony accompanied by sacrifice, music, trumpets and the shout. And in Ezra 3:11, at the celebration of the founding of the Second Temple, the choral refrain of praise is answered by the people's shout.

The word *terûā* seems, in its ritual sense, to have been reserved for a cry of acclamation. The verb *rinnēn* and its derivative nouns are also used for the praise shout (Ps. 42:5; Isa. 12:6; 51:11), and for the recital of Yahweh's goodness which accompanied the thankoffering (Ps. 107:22; 126:2). Handclapping and instrumental music are associated with the *rinnā*, (Pss. 47:2; 33:1). A description of the developed ritual concludes in Nu. 9:24 with the people's shout and prostration of themselves. But this root is also used for cries of supplication and intercession, especially the entreaties of individuals (I Ki. 8:28; Jer. 7:16; Ps. 17:1). There are no examples of its use for a shout of petition accompanying a sacrifice, though other evidence suggests that this lack in our sources is accidental.

The words *zā'aq*, *tsā'aq*, meaning "to cry for help" are used of Samuel's intercessory prayer at a public sacrifice (I Sam. 7:9), and of the people's entreaty on a fast day in time of trouble (Joel 1:14; cf. 2:17; Isa. 30:19). They are used also in Pss. 88:2 and 107:13, but not in connection with any specific reference to sacrifice. Ju. 21:2-4 tells of a People's Entreaty accompanied by ritual weeping and sacrifice; cf. Isa. 1:11-15. *qāra'* and *shawā'*, too, are used of supplications; it may be inferred from Pss. 3:5, 8; 20:10; 119:146, etc., that they connote ejaculatory cries like "Arise! Save!", as well as longer prayers.

The shout or cry associated with sacrifice belongs thus to either one of two main types, acclamation and petition. These correspond to Gunkel's two principal Psalm classifications, Thanksgiving and Entreaty, and also to two distinct kinds of the refrains already considered, viz.,—

#### CRIES OF ACCLAMATION

Ps. 46:8, 12 "Yahweh of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge."

Ps. 57:6, 12 "Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens, thy glory above all the earth."

Ps. 67:4, 6 "Let the peoples give thanks to thee, O God, let all the peoples give thanks to thee."

#### CRIES OF PETITION

Ps. 3:8a "Arise, Yahweh, save me, O my God!"

Ps. 4:2a "Answer me when I call, O my God of righteousness!"

Ps. 20:10 "O Yahweh, save the king, and answer us when we call!"

Ps. 61:2 "Hear my cry, O God, give ear to my prayer!"

Ps. 80:4, 8, 20 "Restore us, O God, and let thy face shine, that we may be saved!"

Ps. 82:8 "Arise, O God, judge the earth!"

Ps. 84:9 "O Yahweh, God of hosts, hear my prayer, give ear, O God of Jacob."

To the acclamations may be added Ps. 100:5a "For he is good, his mercy is forever", which is found also in Pss. 106:1; 107:1, in a shortened form repeatedly in Pss. 118 and 136, and also, significantly, in Jer. 33:11; II Chr. 5:13; 7:6; 20:21 and Ezra 3:11.

There are other psalms in which the words of the shout can be recovered with a degree of probability, some marked by *selāh*, some linked with a reference to the moment of sacrifice, and others distinguished syntactically from their immediate context and resembling one or other of the above refrains. The following is a suggested list:

People's Entreaties: Pss. 44:24; 60:7b; 74:22a; 79:9a; 85:5, 8; 89:47; 90:13; 106:47a; 108:6, 7; 123:3a; 126:4a.

Individual Entreaties: Pss. 6:5; 7:7a; 9:20aa; 17:13aa; 31:17; 35:23aa; 38:23; 39:13a; 40:14; 54:3a, 4a; 55:2a; 59:5b; 61:2; 70:2 (cf. 40:14); 102:2a; 143:7a.

Hymns or People's Thanksgivings: Pss. 8:2ab, 10; 29:9cc (cf. vv. 1, 2 and 96:7, 8; 115:1; Isa. 6:3) Pss. 33:20b (cf. 115:9b, 10b, 11b); 68:20a, 36c (cf. v. 27); 99:3b, 5c (cf. v. 9e); 103:1a, 2a, 22c; 104:1a, 35cd. The *Hallelūjāh* in Pss. 105 ff., 111 ff., was, as its imperative form shows, a priestly summons before it became a popular cry; Ps. 107:1 suggests that it evoked the response "for he is good, for his mercy endureth forever."

Individual Thanksgivings: Pss. 30:5; 52:11; 54:8c (doubtless the *kī tōb* indicated the full response *kī tōb kī l'ōlām ḥasdō*); 116:14, 18.

Songs of Zion: 48:2a; 76:5a; 84:9, 10.

Hymns of Yahweh's Enthronement: Pss. 24:8bc, 10bc; 47:10d.

Royal Psalms: Pss. 2:12d; 21:14a; 132:8a.

It may be objected that a number of the above examples cannot readily be separated from their metrical context, and therefore that they may only echo the cult cry rather than preserve it. On the other hand, Ps. 136 is sufficient evidence that voice and response may be closely united metrically in the liturgy, and in an example like Ps. 7:7a the people's cry is caught up by a choir. It is to be remembered, further, that the Psalter contains material from widely separated periods, that some of the older Psalms have been considerably worked over, and that in later compositions devotional use was made of old liturgical phrases. Consequently there must remain a margin of uncertainty among the examples given.

In conclusion, a suggestion may be made as to the reason for the pointing of SLH with the vowels of *netsah*. It seems very probable that this adaptation of the rubric belongs to the same editorial process which contributed the title *lam<sup>e</sup>natsts<sup>e</sup>h* (usually translated "for the Director, or, Chief Musician") to 29 of the 39 Psalms which contain *selāh*. The Psalm titles have several points of contact with the language of the Chronicler, and apart from the Psalm titles, the Pi'el *nitsts<sup>e</sup>h* is found only in Chronicles and its continuation, Ezra. Of its eight occurrences there, none has the singular subject presupposed by the translation "Director" in the Psalm titles. In every case the subject is a body of Levites who give leadership as a *body* in a liturgical service. According to

I Chr. 23:4, no less than 24,000 were set apart for this purpose, clearly to act in relays or "courses", not as individuals. A comparison of vv. 16 and 20, 21 of I Chr. 15 indicates that the lead was given to the people by "raising the voice in festal praise." In Ezra 3:8-11, the Levites were appointed, not "to have oversight of the (building) work of the house," but "to lead" (*l<sup>e</sup>natstsēah*) "the service of the house"; as a result, when the workmen laid the foundation, the priests with trumpets and the Levites with cymbals led in thanksgiving to Yahweh "for he is good, for his mercy is forever"; "and the people shouted with a great shout (*t<sup>e</sup>rū'ā*) when they praised Yahweh". Cf. II Chr. 5:13. Clearly the people echoed the words of the priests and Levites. II Chr. 13:12 speaks of priests having "the trumpets of the shout to raise the shout"; II Ch. 23:13 of singers who were leading (lit., "teaching", *môdî'im*) the praise; and II Chr. 35:3 of Levites who "taught" (*m<sup>e</sup>bînîm*) all Israel (i.e., the congregation).

In the light of the last three passages particularly the words of Ps. 89:16 are seen in a new light: "blessed are the people who know the shout" (*yôd<sup>e</sup>'ē t<sup>e</sup>rū'ā*). Furthermore, two words in the title of Ps. 60 are seen to be related: *lam<sup>e</sup>natstsēah* and *l<sup>e</sup>lammēd* "to teach." The former in all Psalm titles where it occurs evidently marks off these as requiring choral leadership for their performance in the temple service. The *netsah* which has given its vowels to *selāh* is probably not the noun meaning "everlastingness" but a secondary form derived from this specialized use of the Pi'el of the verb. It was an abbreviated rubric to indicate the points where choral leadership of the people's shout was called for. It is natural that it was accommodated to the more primitive rubric SLH that had marked the people's shout itself.

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