

## Guidelines for Understanding and Proclaiming the Psalms

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At first glance the Psalms are among the most inviting sections of the Bible for the preacher because of how well loved and familiar they are to believers. Yet, though the Psalms are perennial favorites widely read for devotional purposes, for counseling and ministering to the sick, and for public worship, they apparently are rarely preached or taught.<sup>1</sup> Stevenson vividly describes this paradox:

Writers of hymns and makers of sermons are drawn to the psalter as bees are drawn to a field of clover. The heavenly nectar is there for the taking-or so it seems at first glance. Nevertheless, what minister has not been captured by a psalm, only to be defeated and humiliated in his attempt to turn it into a sermon?<sup>2</sup>

Donald E. Gowan's book on preaching the Old Testament, *Reclaiming the Old Testament for the Christian Pulpit*, has discussions on every portion of the text except the Psalms. He seeks to justify this omission by saying they are primarily words addressed to God rather than oracles from God. He recommends that "we ought to pray them and sing them rather than preach them." However, he does recognize that a few psalms are didactic, being addressed to fellow human beings, and thus appropriate for preaching.<sup>3</sup> Therefore

<sup>1</sup> See W. H. Bellinger, Jr., "Let the Words of My Mouth: Proclaiming the Psalms," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 27 (Fall 1984): 17; and Ronald Barclay Allen, *Praise! A Matter of Life and Breath* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1980), pp. 17-18.

<sup>2</sup> Dwight Stevenson, *In the Biblical Preacher's Workshop* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967), p. 159.

<sup>3</sup> Donald E. Gowan, *Reclaiming the Old Testament for the Christian Pulpit* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1980), pp. 145-46.

he offers a few comments on one wisdom psalm.<sup>4</sup> Achtemeier states that some people maintain it is impossible to preach from the Psalms.<sup>5</sup>

Are the Psalms to be restricted to personal devotions and reading in public worship? Or is it feasible and proper to preach these wonderful words? Are there any hermeneutical or homiletical keys to help unlock this treasure chest of inspirational gems? The present writer asserts that the answer to the last two questions is yes.

However, anyone wishing to proclaim the Psalter properly encounters the general dilemma of how to be true to the biblical text and yet relevant to modern mankind. As Kaiser has pointed out, sermons frequently emphasize one of two extremes: a historical recounting of the biblical stories with little attempt to show any relationship to the present; or a dynamic message that speaks to contemporary needs, but with little exegetical basis in the biblical text.<sup>6</sup> Kaiser has contributed significantly to solving this problem. He includes a helpful chapter on the use of poetry in expository preaching.<sup>7</sup> Patrick Miller cogently argues that the Psalms may occupy the most advantageous position in the Bible for bridging the "gap between then and now, the ancient world and the present world."

The present article delineates guidelines for bridging the gap from exegesis (focusing on the historical) to proclamation (preaching timeless truths in the present). It presents five hermeneutical ques-

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 106-8.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Achtemeier, "Preaching from the Psalms," *Review and Expositor* 81 (Summer 1984): 437.

<sup>6</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), pp. 18-20. Cf. Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), pp. 25-28. Robinson describes two extremes: those who prepare the sacred text "as an appetizer to get a sermon underway" or as a mere "launching pad for the preacher's own opinions"; and others who lecture to people about history or archaeology instead of confronting people about themselves from the Bible or who seek to apply the text but do so inappropriately. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, chap. 11, pp. 211-34. Stevenson had previously made some progress including specific comments on preaching a psalm (*Biblical Preacher's Workshop*, pp. 159-77). On the other hand Bellinger has addressed the matter from both an exegetical and homiletical perspective ("Let the Words of My Mouth: Proclaiming the Psalms"). The present writer focuses on these two perspectives with similar but distinct conclusions.

<sup>8</sup> Patrick Miller, Jr., *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 22. Briefly his main reasons are as follows: It possesses general familiarity, past and present, as the historic songbook of Jew and Christian; it addresses God from situations common to all mankind; it uses images which reflect typical human experience; it exhibits a rich interaction with the New Testament-being referred to more times than any other Old Testament book (pp. 22-28).

tions to ask in approaching the Psalms and makes five suggestions for proclaiming the Psalter.<sup>9</sup> It aims to assist pastors, teachers, students, and laypersons who want to understand the Psalms better and proclaim them more effectively.

### **Hermeneutical Questions for Approaching the Psalter**

#### **DO ANY RECURRING IDEAS (OR REFRAINS) GIVE CLUES TO THE STRUCTURE OR THEMES OF THE PSALM?**

Kaiser supplies a beneficial list of 18 psalms with refrains that indicate stanzas (or strophes).<sup>10</sup> To notice readily the refrain, it is necessary to read the whole psalm at least two or three times in a good modern version along with a reading in Hebrew if possible. The classic example is Psalm 42-43, which seems to have formed a single prayer in the original Hebrew text as seen by its thrice-repeated refrain (coupled with the absence of a superscription for Ps. 43). Thus it consists of three stanzas with an identical refrain.<sup>11</sup> Each refrain combines the dual notes of distress and hope (or trust). In Psalm 42 the lament emphasizes the note of despair but concludes with a note of distant hope after the prayer of Psalm 43.<sup>12</sup> Though the words of the refrain do not change, with each repetition they take on increased nuances of meaning from intervening stanzas.<sup>13</sup>

Ideally one should treat an entire psalm in a message (or at least a whole stanza in a longer psalm such as Psalm 119<sup>14</sup>). Each psalm must be read as a literary unit, not atomized into single verses. Besides the presence of a refrain or an alphabetic acrostic, the most obvious criterion for determining strophes is repeated catchwords such as the reiterated call "Yahweh" ("LORD") or the introductory or fi-

<sup>9</sup> These two major aspects are analogous to divisions explored by Bellinger in "Let the Words of My Mouth: Proclaiming the Psalms."

<sup>10</sup> Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, pp. 214-15. These are as follows: Psalms 39, 42-43, 44, 46, 49, 56, 57, 59, 62, 67, 78, 80, 99, 107, 118, 136, 144, and 145 (with a substitution of Ps. 118 for Kaiser's 114, the latter being apparently a typographical error). Psalms 42 and 43 are counted as one psalm because of the internal unity of the refrain in 42:5, 11 and 43:5.

<sup>11</sup> For a helpful structural analysis, consult Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), pp. 325-29, and Bernhard W. Anderson, *Out of the Depths*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), pp. 84-85.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, pp. 325-26, 329; and Anderson, *Out of the Depths*, p. 77.

<sup>13</sup> Stevenson, In the Biblical Preacher's Workshop, p. 164.

<sup>14</sup> See Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), p. 173; and Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, p. 55.

nal phrase "Thus says the LORD" or "says the LORD."<sup>15</sup> Kaiser correctly urges caution concerning the occurrence of the enigmatic *Selah*, which may sometimes be a structural indicator, though not always.<sup>16</sup>

#### WHAT IS THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE PSALM?

In seeking to ascertain the historical setting of a psalm, three steps should be followed. First, utilize the superscription information judiciously. Consider the historical references in the superscriptions as reliable early tradition though not inerrant.<sup>17</sup> Regardless of one's opinion of the superscriptions, Miller suggests two ways in which they open up possibilities for interpretation. (1) They suggest a circumstance in which the psalm was appropriate and thus provide an illustrative clue to interpretation. (2) Attributing certain psalms to David or some other writer is not merely to give an author's identity but also to "receive them from the lips and heart of one who in many respects" was a "representative human being ... that sort of ambiguous mixture of good and bad, joy and despair, obedience and disobedience, that we all are."<sup>18</sup>

Second, examine the internal evidence for clues (especially when the psalm has no historical superscription). For instance Psalm 2 arose out of international turmoil, though the specific situation is not clear; yet the anonymous historical crisis lends a definite orientation to the psalm. Yahweh asserted His sovereignty over such circumstances (vv. 4-5) and established His anointed as king.<sup>19</sup>

Third, explore the general historical/cultural backdrop of the psalm. The best resource here is the vividly illustrated commentary by Othmar Keel.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Charles F. Kraft, cited in Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, p. 216.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

<sup>17</sup> Though many scholars tend to ignore them as late additions to the text, two pieces of evidence suggest that they may have been quite early additions to the Hebrew text. (1) The presence of superscriptions in the Septuagint furnishes evidence that many titles were added long before Hellenistic times, since certain technical terms were misunderstood by the Greek translators (Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. [Chicago: Moody Press, 1974], pp. 451-52). (2) Also there are superscriptions in the extant psalms of the Dead Sea Scrolls. However, it is true that no manuscript is extant for any of the dozen or so psalms in the Masoretic Text with a specific historical situation in the superscription. (Cf. James A. Sanders, *The Psalms Scroll of Qumran Cave 11*, Discoveries in the Judaean Desert [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965]).

<sup>18</sup> Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>19</sup> C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Poetic Books of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), p. 127.

<sup>20</sup> Othmar Keel, *Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*, trans. Timothy J. Hallett (New York: Seabury Press,

## WHAT IS THE PSALM'S PROBABLE CLASSIFICATION?

Understanding a psalm may be enhanced by classifying it according to function (i.e., form-critical category) and according to content (such as historical, wisdom, imprecatory, penitential, or messianic). Since neither classification system is sufficient to encompass the diversity of the Psalter, both categories should be utilized.<sup>21</sup> The form-critical approach is often helpful but should be used cautiously. It serves to unlock the basic literary structure of each type (or category) of psalm. Anderson's excellent handbook is indispensable for this process.<sup>22</sup> Yet as Allen notes, the form-critical method is a "good servant but a bad master," since there are individual variations in the literary patterns.<sup>23</sup> Two questions may help classify a psalm form-critically. Who is speaking? Is it an individual (indicated by the singular personal pronouns "I," "me," or "my") speaking about personal needs, troubles, or joys? Is it the community--or nation--(indicated by the plural "we" or "us")? Or is it the infrequent occurrence of a corporate "I" (an individual such as the king speaking as a representative of the community or nation as a whole)<sup>24</sup> or, perhaps rarely, even both the individual and the community interacting?<sup>25</sup>

*What is the mood (or emotional orientation)?* The Psalter oscillates in a continuum between lament and praise. As Westermann states, "These are the two basic melodic sounds which, like quiet echoes, accompany God's actions."<sup>26</sup> Is the mood primarily a call to praise because of God's attributes and actions? Allen says this mes-

1978). To some extent Anderson, *Out of the Depths*, is also helpful here.

<sup>21</sup> Bullock, *An Introduction to the Poetic Books of the Old Testament*, pp. 122-23, 139; cf. Christoph Barth, *Introduction to the Psalms* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), p. 14.

<sup>22</sup> Anderson, *Out of the Depths*. Though he emphasizes the form-critical approach, he wisely incorporates both function and content into his categories.

<sup>23</sup> The danger is "blurring the individuality of particular psalms as they are judged in light of hypothetical, generalized ideals" (Leslie Allen, *Psalms: Word Biblical Themes* [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987], p. 17). Cf. Douglas Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Primer for Students and Pastors*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), p. 110.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Ralph Smith, "The Use and Influence of the Psalms," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 27 (Fall 1984): 13; cf. Bullock, *An Introduction to the Poetic Books of the Old Testament*, p. 128. In contrast to the last category, Miller approvingly cites Becker's conclusions that the "I" of several individual psalms was edited and reworked to reflect the situation of postexilic Israel (Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms*, pp. 12-13). The implications of this suggestion must be scrutinized carefully before it is accepted.

<sup>25</sup> William Sanford LaSor, David Allan Hubbard, and Frederic Wm. Bush, *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), p. 512.

<sup>26</sup> Claus Westermann, *The Psalms: Structure, Content, and Message* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1980), p. 11; cf. p. 25.

sage of a psalm may be summarized by the words, "God is good." Or is it primarily set in a "minor key" crying out for help? In Allen's words this message is summarized in the words, "Life is tough" (an indicator of a lament).<sup>27</sup> The latter type frequently asks the question "How long?" (e.g., Pss. 13:1-2; 74:10) or "Why?" (e.g., Pss. 10:1, 13; 74:1, 11).<sup>28</sup> Though perhaps more than one-third of the Psalms are laments,<sup>29</sup> frequently the presence of the majestic and omnipotent God propelled the psalmist into praise for expected deliverance. Practically all laments (except perhaps Ps. 88) contain this element of praise or confidence of deliverance.<sup>30</sup>

#### WHAT IS THE PSALM'S SETTING IN WORSHIP?

Sometimes a psalm was especially designed for use in Israel's worship (such as probably Ps. 24). Other psalms were apparently later adapted for such purposes (such as Pss. 30 and 118).<sup>31</sup> Though there is a degree of subjectivity here, normally a liturgical usage can be detected by one or more of the following clues: a question followed by a response by the worshipers (e.g., Pss. 15:1; 24:3, 8, 10); an exhortation or even a refrain to worshipers to respond (Pss. 118:2-4; 129:1-135:1-3, 19-20); a refrain perhaps indicating response (Ps. 136); or a notice in the superscription (Pss. 30 and 92).

#### IS THE PSALM QUOTED OR ALLUDED TO IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

Since there is no unanimity concerning how many quotations of or allusions to the Psalms are found in the New Testament, students of Scripture should utilize reference tools in evaluating the evidence. For those who can work with the Hebrew and Greek texts, an indispensable resource is Archer and Chirichigno's monumental compilation of 312 Old Testament quotations in the New consisting of the Hebrew, the Greek Septuagint, and the Greek New Testament quotations in parallel columns with a brief commentary on their relationships.<sup>32</sup> In English a valuable handbook of the parallel Old Testa-

<sup>27</sup> Allen, *Praise! A Matter of Life and Breath*, pp. 30, 34.

<sup>28</sup> See also Miller's additional examples of the question "Why?" in the laments (*Interpreting the Psalms*, p. 101).

<sup>29</sup> Anderson, *Out of the Depths*, pp. 58, 66. This is more than any other category.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 75-76; 107-9; cf. Bullock, *An Introduction to the Poetic Books of the Old Testament*, pp. 132-33. Miller observes that the movement of the Psalms is always toward praise in the individual psalms and even in the shape of the Psalter as a whole. The first half of the Psalter is dominated by lament psalms but moves increasingly to hymns of praise with the ultimate climax being Psalm 150 as the grand finale. See his *Interpreting the Psalms*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>31</sup> Bullock, *An Introduction to the Poetic Books of the Old Testament*, p. 129.

<sup>32</sup> Gleason Archer, Jr., and Gregory Chirichigno, *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983). Though making an outstanding contri-

ment and New Testament quotations has been edited by Bratcher. In one sense, it is more comprehensive than Archer's work, since it includes additional citations. Bratcher classifies the references as quotations, allusions, and paraphrases.<sup>33</sup>

In approaching psalms that may be messianic, Bible students should consider the following suggestions. Be aware of the major types of messianic psalms. Several scholars have adapted Delitzsch's five basic categories with minor changes.<sup>34</sup> (1) A "purely" prophetic psalm is one that primarily (or exclusively) refers to Christ (Ps. 110). (2) Eschatological psalms describe the coming of the Lord and the consummation of His kingdom (Pss. 93, 96-99, and perhaps others). (3) Typico-prophetic psalms are those in which the psalmist describes his own experience with language that sometimes goes beyond that experience (or his own circumstances) to become historically true only in Christ (Pss. 8 and 22 and perhaps Pss. 2 and 45).<sup>35</sup> (4) Indirectly messianic psalms were written for the Davidic king (or for the royal activities in general) but with ultimate fulfillment in Christ, the Davidic King par excellence (Ps. 72 and prob-

bution, this volume must be used with discretion. In a few places, Archer's conclusions are somewhat unconventional if not forced. He argues that the New Testament writer of Hebrews consistently utilized the Hebrew text rather than the Septuagint. By contrast, note the conclusions of F. F. Bruce, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), p. xlix; and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 5. For example in quoting Psalm 8:5 (Heb., v. 6), Hebrews 2:7 supposedly follows the Hebrew text which in turn is followed by the Septuagint (see Archer and Chirichigno, *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament*, pp. 58-59). Rather than choosing a rare usage of the Hebrew word אֱלֹהִים ("gods") to conform the Old Testament to the New Testament, this writer prefers to understand the Septuagint's ἀγγέλους as a scribal change because of reverence for God. The Old Testament context should be determinative rather than using a New Testament citation to determine the original meaning. (See Donald R. Glenn, "Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2: A Case Study in Biblical Hermeneutics and Biblical Theology," in *Waloord: A Tribute*, ed. Donald K. Campbell [Chicago: Moody Press, 1982], pp. 41-42). Similarly Archer concludes that the usage of Psalm 2:9 by John in Revelation follows the Hebrew text rather than the Septuagint (*Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament*, pp. 57, 59).

<sup>33</sup> Robert G. Bratcher, ed., *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament*, 3d rev. ed. (London: United Bible Societies, 1987). This latest edition has added an appendix of Old Testament quotations according to the order of the Old Testament books.

<sup>34</sup> The writer acknowledges dependency on two of his former professors. For the basic description of each category (except for minor changes), see Allen P. Ross, "Psalms," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, 2 vols. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983, 1985), 1:789-90; cf. Bruce K. Waltke, "A Canonical Process Approach to the Psalms," in *Tradition and Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg*, ed. John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), pp. 6-7.

<sup>35</sup> See Glenn, "Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2," p. 47; contrast S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., who says it is directly predicted (*The Old Testament in the New: An Argument for Inspiration* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980], pp. 15, 19).

ably Pss. 2 and 45).<sup>36</sup> (5) Typically messianic psalms refer to circumstances of the times but prefigure some aspect of Christ's life (Pss. 34 and 69 and probably Ps. 40). As stated in the previous footnote, this fivefold classification may be challenged because distinctions between the last three categories are a little blurred. Also Waltke has criticized this method because, in his judgment, it basically limits the typical element to psalms cited in the New Testament--thus failing to provide an adequate method for identifying the messianic element in the Psalms.

Bullock's work adds a supplemental element that may be used in conjunction with the fivefold classification to provide balance. He suggests two types of potentially messianic psalms (in the larger sense):<sup>37</sup> those that refer to the King and His rule (such as Pss. 2, 18, 45, 72, and 110); and those that deal with man and his life generally (such as Pss. 8, 16, 22, 34, 40, 55, 69, 102).<sup>38</sup> Bullock suggests three criteria for identifying psalms not directly quoted in the New Testament:<sup>39</sup> when the language of the psalm outruns the abilities of the human subject (as in Ps. 72:8);<sup>40</sup> when specifically messianic terms occur, such as "anointed," "son of man," or mention of the Davidic dynasty,<sup>41</sup> and when New Testament circumstances fit those described in the psalm (cf. Ps. 55:12-13, 20 with Jesus' betrayal and passion). These suggestions are appreciated; however, caution must be urged since subjectivity is involved. The safest approach is to restrict the messianic psalms to those either quoted or alluded to with reference to Christ's life.

A balanced approach is needed. Christ should not be seen in almost every psalm as did Augustine, some of the Reformers,<sup>42</sup> and even

<sup>36</sup> It is debatable whether evidence is sufficient to demarcate clearly between categories 3, 4, and (to some extent) 5. Though using the term "typically messianic," H. C. Leupold's classification of Psalm 2 seems to fit here in category 4 (indirectly messianic) (*Exposition of the Psalms* [reprint, Baker Book House, 1969], pp. 42-43).

<sup>37</sup> In the strictest sense "messianic prophecy" occurs only when the Messiah (a King) or His reign is described (see LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush, *Old Testament Survey*, p. 398).

<sup>38</sup> Bullock, *An Introduction to the Poetic Books of the Old Testament*, pp. 142-44. He also lists additional royal psalms. The ones cited are those the present writer considers most probable.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>40</sup> However, a similar principle suggested over a century ago by John Brown has been critiqued by Kaiser as too ambiguous to be of significant help. See Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), p. 130.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush, *Old Testament Survey*, pp. 398-99.

<sup>42</sup> See Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, pp. 20-22.



as Waltke does (though he denies that his approach is extreme)." He states, "from a literary and historical point of view ... the human subject of the psalms--whether it be the blessed man of Psalm 1, the one proclaiming himself the son of God in Psalm 2, the suffering petitioner in Psalms 3-7, the son of man in Psalm 8--is Jesus Christ."<sup>44</sup> Bible expositors need to remember that the experiences of the authors of the Psalms must not be minimized or obliterated.<sup>45</sup> Nor should one hold as do various critics, that there are no messianic features in the Psalms.<sup>46</sup>

### Suggestions for Proclaiming the Psalter Effectively

#### APPROACH THE PSALTER FROM THE FORM-CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE<sup>47</sup>

The Psalter runs the gamut of life experiences (including as Miller suggests, "disaster, war, sickness, exile, celebration, marriage, birth, death")<sup>48</sup> and emotions (including "joy, terror, reflections, gratitude, hate, contentment, depression").<sup>49</sup> Since people in churches today face many of these same experiences and emotions, pastors should study and proclaim all types of psalms.<sup>50</sup>

For example the lament psalms, with their heart-throbbing anguish, express the eternal questions in the human breast in the face of crisis, tragedy, loneliness, or sickness: "Why Lord?" (or "Why me?") or "How long, O Lord, will You be angry with me?" Yet these psalms

<sup>43</sup> Waltke, "A Canonical Process Approach to the Psalms," pp. 4, 6-7. He argues that his approach does justice to both the historical and messianic significances in contrast to the allegorical method or the Antiochian principle of one historical meaning that may have typical significance. But the present writer disagrees with his former teacher and basically concurs with Darrell L. Bock's critique ("Evangelicals and the Use of the Old Testament in the New: Part I," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142 [July-September 1985]: 220-21). Bock suggests that Waltke's position of rereading the whole of the Old Testament in light of the New Testament ultimately causes the original Old Testament expression of meaning to be "overridden and redefined by the New Testament" (p. 220). For instance, Waltke shifts from an earthly to a heavenly referent for his understanding of Psalm 2 ("Is It Right to Read the New Testament into the Old?" *Christianity Today*, September 2, 1983, p. 77). Cf. Bock's subsequent article, "Evangelicals and the Use of the Old Testament in the New: Part 2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142 (October-December 1985): 309-10, esp. 316, n. 2).

<sup>44</sup> Waltke, "A Canonical Process Approach to the Psalms," p. 7.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Ross, "Psalms," p. 789.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>47</sup> See Achtemeier, "Preaching from the Psalms," p. 438.

<sup>48</sup> Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms*, p. 19; cf. Donald MacLeod, who emphasizes the mood of the psalm as a clue to the germaneness of the psalmist's message for today ("Preaching from the Psalms," in *Biblical Preaching: An Expositor's Treasury*, ed. James W. Cox [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983], p. 109).

<sup>49</sup> Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms*, p. 19.

<sup>50</sup> See Bellinger, "Let the Words of My Mouth: Proclaiming the Psalms," p. 19.

may suddenly introduce an element of praise or expectation of the Lord's deliverance, thus giving hope to believers today. Expositors can challenge believers to dare to believe in God. One example of this is Psalm 13, which moves from the desperate mood of loneliness and despair (vv. 1-2--"How long?" is repeated four times), in which one "screams" to God for help (vv. 3-4) to the confident expectation of the Lord's deliverance (vv. 5-6).<sup>51</sup>

The most problematic portions of the Psalms are those classified as imprecatory (almost always a subcategory of the lament) in which the psalmist prayed for divine judgment on his enemies. Though one may be tempted to consider these verses as "sub-Christian," he must deal honestly with the text. Psalm 109, the most pervasively imprecatory psalm, may be shocking to modern-day congregations. Psalms such as this one may help believers deal honestly with their anger and hatred by channeling these emotions *to* and *through* God rather than by expressing them (either verbally or physically) at others.<sup>52</sup>

### TRANSFER THE LANGUAGE OF THE PSALTER TO FIT TODAY'S CULTURE<sup>53</sup>

A first step in relating the Psalms to present-day needs is to note various figures of speech and state their literal meaning.<sup>54</sup>

This should be followed by converting the metaphorical language of the psalm to a modern equivalent. After answering the question, "How did the metaphor function in ancient Israel?" one is ready to address the question, "How do people describe (or encounter)

<sup>51</sup> Allen, *Praise! A Matter of Life and Breath*, pp. 150-64.

<sup>52</sup> When rightly understood, these psalms do not contradict Jesus' teaching to love one's enemies but should help believers not to be "overcome by evil" as they ventilate anger to God and let Him take care of justice against those who insult or abuse them (see Rom. 12:19-21). See Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, pp. 183-84, and Bellinger, "Let the Words of My Mouth: Proclaiming the Psalms," p. 19. These four principles may be helpful in understanding the imprecatory psalms: (1) The believer's prayers should never include the motive of personal revenge (cf. Ps. 109:21). (2) Vengeance belongs only to God (Rom. 12:17-19). (3) In certain rare cases, it may be acceptable for believers today to pray for God to defeat those who oppose His kingdom's work--if they do not repent (cf. Ps. 59:13; Acts 13:10-11). (4) The foremost prayer of a believer for his enemies should be that of intercession that they might be changed or even saved (cf. Ps. 83:16-18; Matt. 5:44). The writer is much indebted to J. Carl Laney's excellent article ("A Fresh Look at the Imprecatory Psalms," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138 [January-March 1981]: 35-45).

<sup>53</sup> See Achtemeier, "Preaching from the Psalms," p. 439.

<sup>54</sup> Utilize the classic work by E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968). For an excellent synopsis of the main figures and some helpful suggestions, see Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, pp. 121-25. For some criteria to recognize something as figurative and some pitfalls to avoid, see the brief but beneficial discussion by Bruce K. Waltke, "Historical Grammatical Problems," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), pp. 114-17.

that experience today?"<sup>55</sup> For instance little effort is needed to transfer the imagery of being in a pit or drowning in an overwhelming flood (Pss. 42:7; 69:1-3; 88:4-7) to the modern idiom of a crisis. These figures vividly connote "the experience of hopelessness and anxiety, of deep depression and a sense of being so overwhelmed by one's circumstances that there is no way out."<sup>56</sup> Though all metaphors will not translate so readily into a modern equivalent, careful analysis will yield profitable results.<sup>57</sup> Another metaphor worth mentioning is sickness. The laments contain many expressions of pain and physical illness, which may be literal or merely powerful images of emotional distress. For example the language of bones without health, of the heart throbbing, loins filled with burning, and strength failing (Ps. 38) is graphic and familiar to many who have gone through physical or emotional distress.<sup>58</sup>

Another step is to understand correctly the Hebrew use of so-called poetic parallelism. The traditional understanding of this phenomenon is the repetition of meaning in parallel (or balanced) expressions. Three categories are normally cited: synonymous parallelism, in which the thought in the first line is repeated in the second line in different but equivalent words (e.g., Ps. 24:1); antithetic parallelism, in which the second line gives a thought in contrast to or as the opposite of the first line (e.g., Ps. 1:6); and synthetic parallelism, in which the second line completes the thought of the first without parallel meaning (e.g., Pss. 2:6; 119:89). The recognition that the last category is a sort of "catch-all," miscellaneous category has generated several other classifications. These three general groups are not wholly adequate to describe the variety involved in the two-line relationships; however, for the general reader they serve as "rough distinctions" to assist in analyzing meaning.<sup>59</sup>

To facilitate the accurate transfer of meaning to modern man in analyzing Hebrew parallelism, Bible students should look at each verse (or verses) as a whole rather than viewing parts of verses as separate entities. Allen's analogy of stereophonic sound is helpful in

<sup>55</sup> See Bellinger, "Let the Words of My Mouth: Proclaiming the Psalms," pp. 20-21. He describes proclamation as a "bifocal task," which must be sensitive both to the ancient context and to one's present audience.

<sup>56</sup> Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms*, pp. 23-24; cf. Bellinger, "Let the Words of My Mouth: Proclaiming the Psalms," pp. 18, 19, 20.

<sup>57</sup> Miller lists 10 other metaphors and typical experiences in the psalms that are able to speak to and for people today (*Interpreting the Psalms*, pp. 23-25).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>59</sup> See John H. Stek, "Psalms," *NIV Study Bible*, ed. Kenneth L. Barker (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), p. 783.

the sense that the composite whole produces the thought and meaning.<sup>60</sup> In Psalm 19:1-2 there are two sets of synonymously parallel lines, not four lines denoting four different things: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge" (NIV). In verse 1 the psalmist was not saying that "the heavens" are doing one thing and "the skies" an entirely different thing. Instead he was describing one glorious reality. Similarly the second verse adds the new dimension that in both day and night the heavens reveal their Creator.<sup>61</sup> Also one must guard against thinking that parallelism necessarily indicates synonymity, saying exactly the same thing in different words. Though this does occur, the dominant pattern is "a focusing, heightening or specification of ideas, images, action, [or] themes" from one line to the next.<sup>62</sup> Thus normally the second line serves to nuance the original line. In Psalm 24:1, "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it," the second line supports the statement of the first (viz., God's ownership of the world) by specifying that this means its inhabitants belong to Him.<sup>63</sup> The variety of ways in which the psalmists used one line to reinforce, elaborate, or "second" a first line is illustrated in instances where the same first line is balanced by varying second lines. From the common first line, "Sing to the Lord a new song," Psalm 96:1 expands by identifying those who are called to sing; Psalm 98:1 "seconds" by giving a reason for the command; and Psalm 149:1 emphasizes the "what and where" of the song.<sup>64</sup>

Perhaps the wide variety of creative "seconding" features could serve as ideas for the preacher in developing a somewhat dry exegetical statement into a dynamic communication of relevant truths. Robinson suggests that the use of "restatement" in a sermon (similar

<sup>60</sup> Allen, *Praise! A Matter of Life and Breath*, p. 51.

<sup>61</sup> Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, p. 171.

<sup>62</sup> Robert Alter, "The Characteristics of Ancient Hebrew Poetry," in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1987), p. 615. James L. Kugel has argued that the second line serves a "seconding function," basically "an emphatic rhetorical closure" which supports, particularizes, defines, or expands the meaning of the first part (*The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981], pp. 52, 95). For an excellent summary with illustrations, see Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms*, pp. 33-39. The present author agrees with Miller that since the massive work by M. O'Connor (*Hebrew Verse Structure* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1980]) analyzes the many syntactic variations of poetry rather than types of strictly semantic parallels, it is less useful and accessible to the expositor who is focusing on dimensions of meaning rather than grammatical or syntactical nuances.

<sup>63</sup> Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms*, p. 34.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

to that in the Psalms) is of some benefit to the hearers.<sup>65</sup> By examining the creative variety of supporting statements used in the Psalter to present its truths, expositors may be able to develop a modern analogous method. One obvious example is the so-called emblematic parallelism (e.g., Ps. 42:1) in which one line is a literal statement and the other line is a figurative illustration. Sometimes there is no need for expositors to search for good sermon illustrations, since they are built into the passage.<sup>66</sup>

Preachers can also use clues from the "salvation-history"--or "storytelling"--psalms (such as Pss. 78, 105, 106, 135, 136) for the dramatic purpose of recounting and reliving the mighty acts of the Lord (in the present as well as the past).<sup>67</sup> These psalms recount Yahweh's "salvation deeds," beginning with the events of the Exodus, as being inseparably related to their contemporary circumstances. The recounting of the Exodus event at Passover was actually a dramatic reenactment in which the hearers played a part. Similarly for the psalmists, the Lord was still unfolding His drama of redemption. The last act or scene had not yet been completed.<sup>68</sup>

This has significant ramifications for rehearsing the Lord's salvation deeds today. Just as the Exodus events were the vehicle for Yahweh's initial act of salvation for Israel, so today the events of Christ's passion have effected salvation for Church-Age believers. To transfer the rich meaning of these events, pastors might consider at least two applications. (1) Some homileticians have emphasized preaching as a "narrative" or "story." Bellinger suggests that the task of preaching is not merely retelling the story or drawing lessons from the text but also translating that message into "life story." He argues that the wise use of illustrations is one means by which to as-

<sup>65</sup> Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Ronald J. Allen, "Shaping Sermons by the Language of the Text," in *Preaching Biblically*, ed. Don M. Wardlaw (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), pp. 35-37. He suggests that sometimes one should substitute a contemporary metaphor for the biblical one if it conveys the equivalent "vibration" or feeling.

<sup>67</sup> These psalms, which often emphasize the Exodus event, have a twofold purpose: (1) didactic--to teach the meaning of Israel's history and God's faithfulness; and (2) dramatic--to reenact Yahweh's involvement in history in which its hearers played a part. However, there are other psalms that also praise Yahweh for His deeds of salvation (e.g., Pss. 66:5-7; 71:15-16; 75:1; 77:11-15; 98:1-3; 107:31-32; 145:4-6). See Anderson, *Out of the Depths*, pp. 53-56.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49, 53; cf. Leupold, who notes that the events were "presented as part and parcel of a living tradition" (*Exposition of the Psalms*, p. 562). However, he is skeptical that Psalm 78 had a place in Israel's worship. The Passover ritual today has captured the dramatic aspect and the involvement of the present generation (Anderson, *Out of the Depths*, p. 49). Cf. Rabbi Nathan Goldberg, *Passover Haggadah: A New English Translation and-Instructions for the Seder* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1966).

sist people in making the Scriptures a reality in their lives.<sup>69</sup> (2) Others suggest using drama to reenact the mighty deliverance of the Lord (cf. the Passover in Exodus and the Lord's Supper as commemorating the saving work of Christ). This may involve asking a member of the congregation to give a testimony or sing a song to support a sermon principle<sup>70</sup> or preaching a brief message on one of the "salvation-history" psalms as a prelude to observing the Lord's Supper. An opportunity to give a testimony or share God's mighty deeds could precede this observance.<sup>71</sup> Another idea is to explore the use of pantomime or a short play by members of the congregation to illustrate an essential part of the psalm.

#### CAPITALIZE ON THE GENERALIZED TERMS AND STYLIZED LANGUAGE OF THE PSALMS AS A POSSIBLE CLUE TO THE TIMELESS MESSAGE

Achtemeier objects to the assumption that the basic lack of historical references in the Psalter is automatically a reflection of the general condition of mankind; she denies that the message should be applied apart from the context of Israel. So she affirms that, except for a very few psalms (e.g., Pss. 23 and 90), its truths are normally restricted to those in the New Covenant community, namely, believers and not mankind in general.<sup>72</sup>

However, the generalized language is frequently indicative of timeless principles that transcend cultural boundaries--even though often restricted to believers. An interesting illustration is the refrain in Psalm 46:7 and 11 ("The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold"). It continues the thematic statement of verse 1 that "God is our refuge and strength," one of the timeless principles in the psalm. The two strands of the historically conditioned and the universally applicable are intertwined in the mention of the God of Jacob and Yahweh Sabaoth (the Lord of hosts) respectively; the latter involves a resumption of the principle found in verse 1.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Bellinger, "Let the Words of My Mouth: Proclaiming the Psalms," p. 21 (and n. 20); see also Allen ("Shaping Sermons by the Language of the Text," pp. 34-35), who suggests that preaching, guided by proper exegesis, should seek to join the text and listener in such a way that the text comes alive as it did for its ancient recipients. It "lets the world of the text shape our perception of our own world in ways that are historically, aesthetically, and otherwise appropriate" (ibid., p. 35).

<sup>70</sup> This is especially effective if interspersed within the sermon itself.

<sup>71</sup> This writer has used this approach with seeming success.

<sup>72</sup> Achtemeier, "Preaching from the Psalms," pp. 440-42. This writer disagrees with Achtemeier's assumption that believers today are the new Israel.

<sup>73</sup> This author interprets Yahweh Sabaoth (יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת) as referring to the Commander of the armies (hosts) of earth and heaven (angels and stars). That this is a universal aspect is corroborated by verse 10, in which God speaks of being exalted among (all) the nations of the earth.

The most fertile ground is located in the pervasive lament psalms. These psalms include stereotyped language that rarely refers to specific historical situations. Apparently the psalmists utilized accepted literary conventions of the day, as demonstrated by the close resemblance of the general structure and imagery to that of Babylonian psalms.<sup>74</sup> Standardized language left the laments so open-ended that later readers were free to adapt them to varying circumstances and settings.<sup>75</sup> For example the frequent enemies mentioned in these laments are unnamed--lending themselves to adaptation by each successive generation of psalm singers.<sup>76</sup> To discover one possible concrete context for the laments, Miller recommends an innovative approach, namely, tracing their various cliches as they appear in Jeremiah's laments (the so-called confessions of Jeremiah in chaps. 11-20). The experiences of this prophet help illustrate the circumstances surrounding the psalmists as they cried out to the Lord.<sup>77</sup> By studying these experiences (and other Old Testament laments such as those in Job) one can make correlation to modern situations of the congregation easier.<sup>78</sup>

Whether a psalm contains generalized terms or references to specific situations, the task of the expositor is to distill the essential teaching of each stanza into a single sentence. Then this exegetical statement must be stated as a timeless principle. Kaiser defines this process of "principlization" as stating "the author's propositions, arguments, narrations, and illustrations in timeless abiding truths with special focus on the application of those truths to the current needs"<sup>79</sup> of believers. One must avoid the past tense of the verb and any proper names except for those of God in order to restate the biblical

<sup>74</sup> Anderson, *Out of the Depths*, pp. 66-68, 86. An exception to the tendency to omit historical references is Psalm 137, which reflects the situation of the Babylonian exile (*ibid.*, p. 32).

<sup>75</sup> See Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms*, p. 8. The Babylonian laments employed such standardized literary imagery (including descent into the pit and the engulfing billows of the flood). They often left a blank for the name of the worshiper to be filled in who chose to use the psalm. Similarly the biblical psalms have typical language which epitomizes the situations common to mankind. As Anderson observes, "They too seem to leave a blank, as it were, for the insertion of one's own personal name" (*Out of the Depths*, pp. 86-87).

<sup>76</sup> Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms*, pp. 49-51; cf. Anderson, *Out of the Depths*, p. 86.

<sup>77</sup> Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms*, pp. 57-63.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 60, 62-63.

<sup>79</sup> Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, pp. 151-52. For a masterful explication and illustration of this methodology as applied to narrative, see Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988).

thought unrestricted by time, person, places, or cultures.<sup>80</sup> As one thinks of the audience's knowledge and needs, this principle, Robinson declares, should be stated "in the most exact, memorable sentence possible."<sup>81</sup> As a control factor, the expositor must validate his proposed principle in light of subsequent biblical teaching. New Testament evidence may modify, expand, or even negate the application for believers today." The next suggestion will deal with this issue.

#### REFRAIN FROM READING THE NEW TESTAMENT (INCLUDING REFERENCES TO CHRIST) BACK INTO THE PSALTER

A delicate balance is needed here--one sensitive both to the original context, where primary meaning is for the psalmist's time, and to New Testament quotations or allusions--to help develop the theological principles and modern application.<sup>83</sup> Because New Testament writers have selected a few psalms as having a fulfillment in the life of Christ is no warrant for a wholesale equation of other psalms in this manner. Barth states, "We look in vain in the New Testament for a systematic method which would simply equate the voice of Yahweh on the one hand, and on the other hand the voice of Israel, of Israel's kings and of unknown worshippers, with the voice of Jesus, so that His voice would be perceived in practically every psalm."<sup>84</sup> Only when the New Testament applies a psalm to Christ can one today confidently apply it that way. To go beyond this is to indulge in subjective speculation hazardous to legitimate exegesis and biblical proclamation.

However, there is potential value in using a New Testament passage with a psalm for preaching purposes.<sup>85</sup> A rich interaction occurs between many of the psalms and the New Testament. The messianic psalms draw one to Jesus and "gain their specificity, their

<sup>80</sup> Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, p. 231.

<sup>81</sup> Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, p. 97.

<sup>82</sup> Kaiser has cogently argued that the entire canonical context must appear only as a part of the summation of each main point and not as a part of exegesis proper. The emphasis of the text at hand must be communicated, based on the informing theology of antecedent passages rather than allowing a later doctrine to "unpack" the meaning of the text. However, in the sermon itself, theological implications of subsequent teachings must be included (*Toward an Exegetical Theology*, pp. 83, 134-40, 160).

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 160-61. Cf. Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New*, p. 226.

<sup>84</sup> Barth, *Introduction to the Psalms*, p. 71. However, he seems open to the possibility that the Apostles might have looked into every psalm for testimony of Jesus.

<sup>85</sup> See Achtemeier, "Preaching from the Psalms," pp. 447-49. Her implication--that it is always necessary to pair an Old Testament text with a New Testament one for preaching--seems extreme.



reality for us, their concreteness, in the revelation of Jesus."<sup>86</sup> But it is also true that the interaction works the other way. When one preaches from the Gospels, psalms furnish a foundation for understanding the New Testament portrait of Jesus as Shepherd and Light as well as the reality of His role of bringing salvation.<sup>87</sup>

Miller suggests that Psalm 22 gives the reader of the Gospels "the chief interpretive clue to the Passion of Jesus," being picked up repeatedly by quotation or allusion in the portrayal of those events. At the same time the reader of Psalm 22 is "invited to see in the passion of Jesus a concrete and specific example" of one who cries out in the various laments. "His plight becomes a paradigm of the trouble of the lamenting petitioner."<sup>88</sup> It helps the modern reader understand the anguish of the psalmist as well as the intensity of Christ's personal agony as He was being forsaken by God the Father in the face of the taunts and attacks of His enemies.<sup>89</sup>

Miller proposes that the Gospel writers viewed "Jesus as taking up the lament of those who suffer and entering into that suffering."<sup>90</sup> Tremendous potential application exists for proclaiming the relevance of the gospel message to hurting mankind.

#### CONSIDER CORRELATING THE PREACHING OF A PSALM WITH THE ORDER OF THE ENTIRE WORSHIP SERVICE<sup>91</sup>

The form-critical method can help in determining the particular psalm to use at the proper time. Worship leaders need to be aware of the liturgical purposes and specific moods (or responses) evoked by each literary genre. Anderson suggests that the hymn with its mood

<sup>86</sup> Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms*, p. 28

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 63, 100, 108-9.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 110-11. Miller states, "The resurrection is God's response to the cry of the sufferer, the vindication of life over death, the demonstration of God's presence in suffering and power over it." Though not an end to suffering, it shows that God does care about human hurt and sin. He acknowledges that forgiveness of sins was a central part of Jesus' ministry. But his perspective appears to leave room for the view that the atonement (or in his words "the redemptive work of Christ") was efficacious to bring about physical healing. The author cannot agree, particularly if this is an implicit advocacy of divine healers today. For some concise, helpful remarks on this issue, see Alfred Martin and John A. Martin on the New Testament usage of Isaiah 53:4-6 (*Isaiah: The Gloria of the Messiah* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1983]; pp. 137-39).

<sup>91</sup> For a list of several practical suggestions on this matter of coordinating one's preaching a psalm with worship practices, see William E. Hull, "Preaching on the Psalms," *Review and Expositor* 81 (Summer 1984): 453-56. He notes that abundant keyboard literature inspired by the psalms normally allows the selection of "excellent preludes, offertories, and postludes based on a particular psalm or on one related to it" (p. 453). See his p. 453, n. 7 for pertinent resources.

of jubilation belongs at the beginning of the worship service; that the laments with their anguished cry of distress and guilt exhibit a proper attitude conducive to worship; that the attitude of praise for specific acts of God in the thanksgiving psalms is an appropriate response, particularly at the Lord's Supper; and that penitential psalms (basically the laments) belong at the time when worshipers are called to confess their sins and ask God for forgiveness.<sup>92</sup>

Hull offers an excellent format for intertwining the psalms in word and song: the offertory,<sup>93</sup> the reading of the psalm to be treated, singing the psalm as an anthem or solo, and then preaching on it in expository fashion.<sup>94</sup> Thus the call to worship could be extended by singing various hymns or choruses based on the psalms or other specific Scriptures.<sup>95</sup> Choral anthems or solo music inspired by the Psalter can be coordinated in the program.<sup>96</sup> In reading a psalm, several variations are possible: the pastor may read the psalm from a modern version in poetic format; the pastor (or worship leader) and congregation may read the psalm in unison from pew Bibles or from the order of service; the pastor (or worship leader) and congregation may read responsively; the pastor (or worship leader), choir, and parts of the congregation may read antiphonally.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>92</sup> This information is found only in the earlier edition of Bernhard W. Anderson, *Out of the Depths* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), pp. 159-60.

<sup>93</sup> See note 91 above.

<sup>94</sup> Hull, "Preaching on the Psalms," p. 454.

<sup>95</sup> For instance, "O Worship the King," a hymn based on Psalm 104, would fit here. One legitimate contribution of the "charismatics" has been a renewed emphasis on praise and singing Scripture. Donald P. Hustad has documented the resurgence of singing Old Testament psalms in many denominations today. He also lists resources to help in using the psalms in worship ("The Psalms as Worship Expression: Personal and Congregational," *Review and Expositor* 81 [Summer 1984]: 417-21).

<sup>96</sup> See Hull, "Preaching on the Psalms," p. 454.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* Cf. Donald L. Griggs, *Praying and Teaching the Psalms* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), pp. 34-38. Since these responsive readings (or antiphonal readings) will normally be designed (or at least coordinated) by a pastor, the following guidelines may be helpful: (1) Preserve the literary unity of the psalm (i.e., avoid an artificial stringing together of several parts of psalms). (2) Be attentive to the structure for possible clues (such as refrains) for reciting the psalm to enhance congregational participation (cf. Ps. 136). (3) Minor editing of the psalm is acceptable, such as repeating refrains at natural breaks in the psalm (often where *Selah* occurs). See Anderson, *Out of the Depths*, 1974 ed., p. 165. (4) Consider using *Selah* as a pause (or musical interlude) for prayerful meditation on the verses read (see esp. Ps. 46). (5) Use a modern-language version (particularly the New International Version or New King James Version), since the archaisms and overfamiliarity of the King James Version hinder proper understanding (cf. Dwight W. Vogel, *The Psalms for Worship Today* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1974], p. 4). A copy should be given to each person in the congregation ahead of time. See the adaptation of the Jerusalem Bible for group recitation by Alan Neame as cited by Hull, "Preaching on the Psalms," p. 454, and the adaptation of Today's English Version by Vogel, *The Psalms for Worship Today*. (6)

An expository sermon could be preached on a selection such as Psalm 46 with an emphasis on the message of the recurring refrains. The writer suggests concluding the exposition of this psalm by reading it again using *Selah* as a pause (perhaps accompanied by a musical interlude) for meditation on the timeless message.

### Conclusion

This article is an attempt to provide preliminary guidelines for bridging the gap from exegesis to proclamation. Five hermeneutical questions to be asked in approaching the Psalms were discussed. Then five homiletical guidelines were suggested for encouraging effective proclamation of the Psalter.

Bible expositors must never forget the following obvious but profound truth. Though one follows all these hermeneutical and homiletical guidelines, he is doomed to failure without bathing his efforts in prayer. He must depend on the power of the Holy Spirit to energize his preparation. To speak with confidence and authority, he must have received God's message from the text of Holy Scripture (in its proper historical-grammatical-contextual setting) and applied it to his own life. No matter how well prepared intellectually a person may be, only the Holy Spirit can transform inadequate words into life-changing principles.<sup>98</sup> Kaiser wisely states, "Yes, even when we have faithfully discharged our full range of duties as exegetes and when we have also pressed on to apply that exegesis by principlizing the text paragraph by paragraph into timeless propositions which call for an immediate response from our listeners, we still need the Holy Spirit to carry that word home to the mind and hearts of our hearers if that word is ever going to change men's lives."<sup>99</sup>

Explore the possibility of dramatic reading in which parts are assigned to different voices (or even for a single voice alternating with the congregation) according to the natural structure of the text (see Erik Routley, *Exploring the Psalms* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975], pp. 165-66). The present writer has utilized Psalm 107 in this fashion. For this to be effective, practice in reading by the leader (and other individuals) is recommended. (Cf. Ronald Allen and Gordon Borrer, *Worship: Rediscovering, the Missing Jewel* [Portland: Multnomah Press, 1982], pp. 142-45).

<sup>98</sup> Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, pp. 235-40; cf. Charles Stanley, "Spirit-Anointed Preaching," radio broadcast of "In Touch" (February 21, 1989). This principle is consistent with the necessity that the truths of Scripture be first applied to the expositor before seeking to communicate to others. Thus one must not divorce the study of the Bible to get a sermon from studying to feed one's soul (Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, pp. 24-26). The present writer has found that an active program of reading the Psalms devotionally while making "quiet time" notes will develop a helpful file of sermon starters. Unless a preacher listens to God speak to himself personally, he will probably in Stevenson's words "use the text not as a key to open lives, but as a weapon with which to bludgeon them" (Stevenson, *Biblical Preacher's Workshop*, p. 67).

<sup>99</sup> Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, p. 236.

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