

Lecture 1

Historical Approach: Superscripts

I. Importance/Relevance of Topic:

- A. *Insight into spiritual life of Israel's paradigm*
- B. *Insight into interpretation of psalms*
- C. *Validates the New Testament*
- D. *Firm basis that Psalms Speak of Christ.*

II. Superscripts and Subscripts

A. Thirtle's theory:

l'mannesah ("for the director of music" plus optional prepositional phrase pertaining to musical performance, which introduces fifty-five psalms, was originally a postscript to the preceding psalm, not an original part of the superscript.

Argument

1. Paradigmatic example in Habakkuk 3: s/s, prayer and p/s
2. Resolves *interpretum* of Psalm 88: 2 genres and two authors
3. Parallels from the LXX and in 11 QPs^a.
4. Parallels in ancient Near Eastern Literature.
5. Explains Psalm 3 and 4. Diodore of Tarsus (d.c.394) probably right in thinking that the absence of an ascription means that such psalms are related closely to the preceding one; cf. Psalms 1 and 2, Psalm 9 and 10, 42 and 43, and so forth
6. Readily explainable textual error: poetry, prose, prose, poetry.
7. Superscripts pertain to the psalm's composition and the postscripts to its liturgical performance.¹

¹ Waltke, "Superscripts, Postscripts, or both" *JBL* 110 (1991) 583-96

C. An Apologia for the Traditional Approach of Authorship

1. "Of David." לָ ("of/for/by"?) with a proper name usually means "by."²
 - a. A Hymns outside all use this preposition: Exod. 15:1; Judg 5:2; 2 Sam 22:1/18:1; Isa 38:9; Hab 3:1.
 - b. Tradition within Scripture: 1 Sam 16:14-23; Amos 6:5; 1 Chron. 23:5; 2 Chron. 29:25-30; Neh. 12:36).³ "In the Chronicler's day . . . it can scarcely be doubted that the meaning was 'by David.'"⁴
 - c. So also Ben Sirach (47:8-10); the Qumran scrolls (11QPs^a); Josephus, rabbis.⁶
 - d. So also New Testament: Matt. 22:43, 45; Mk. 12:36, 37; Lk. 20:42; Ac. 1:16; 2:25; 4:25; Rom. 4:6; 11:9; Heb. 4:7.
2. Antiquity and reliability of superscripts in general
 - a. No ancient version or Hebrew manuscript omits them.
 - b. Sumerian and Akkadian ritual texts dating from the third millennium contain rubrics corresponding to elements in the Psalter superscripts,⁷ and so do Egyptian hymns from the Eighteenth Dynasty and later:⁸ cultic occasion; official appointed to utter it; type of composition (prayer, incantation, lament); title of composition; instrument/s to accompany it; mode of utterance (singing, reciting, etc.)
 - c. Some psalms ascribed to David are ancient: Ps. 29 Canaanite background
 - d. "Davidic" Psalms contain words, images, and parallelism attested in the Ugaritic texts (ca. 1400 B.C.).⁹
 - e. No hymn in the Old Testament outside of the Psalter lacks a superscript so original to composition (see above).
 - f. Many technical terms in the superscripts obscure to the Greek and Aramaic translators, pointing to an extended gap of time between their composition and

² Moses (Psalm 90), David (73x), Solomon (72, 127), and the guilds and priests associated with David (: the sons of Korah (42-49, 84-87), Asaph (50, 73-83), Heman (88), and Ethan (89).

³ J. Wheeler, "Music of the temple" in *Archaeology and Biblical Research* 2 (1989)

⁴ J. F. A. Sawyer, "An analysis of the context and meaning of the psalm," *Transactions*, 22 (1970): 6.

⁵ *Antiquities*, viii. 305f.

⁶ Charles A. Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (New York, C. Scribner's Sons 1906-1907) p. liv.

⁷ H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (Chico, Calif. : Scholars Press, 1985) pp. 13-24.

⁸ J. B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 365-381.

⁹ Dahood, *Psalms* (AB; Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, 1966-1970) xxix-xxx..

the Tannaitic period,¹⁰ agreeing with David ascription.

- g. Linguistic, stylistic, structural, thematic, and theological differences are so great between the Psalter and its imitative thanksgiving psalms at Qumran as to leave no doubt of the far greater antiquity of the Psalter, and if so, why not by David.
- h. Reference to “tent” of *I AM* only in Davidic psalms.
- i. Arguments against Davidic authorship can be answered
 - 1.) Ps. 24:7, 9: “temple” means “house of God,” not necessarily Solomon’s
 - 2.) Psalm 139: Aramaisms do not prove late date. "evidence of Aramaic influence alone cannot serve as decisive proof for arguing for a late date of a given text."¹¹
 - 3.) Psalm 30:superscript: As Israel's poet laureate, there is good reason to suppose David composed the dedicatory prayer for the temple (Psalm 30) just as he designed and prepared beforehand for its building (1 Chronicles 28).

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¹⁰ The Tannaim are rabbinic sages whose views are recorded in the Mishnah, from approx. 70-200 A.D.

¹¹ A. Hurvitz, "The Chronological Significance of "Aramaisms" in Biblical Hebrew" in *Israel Exploration Journal* 18 (1968). p. 234.

c. Extensive Royal Interpretation.

- 1.) Psalms by sons of Korah refer to king (cf. Psalms 44, 84)
- 2.) Temple music as a whole took its rise from the king: 1 Chron 15-16; 2 Chron 29; Isa 38:20).
- 3.) Throughout the ancient Near East the king took responsibility for worship.
- 4.) In Mesopotamia lament psalms were royal.
- 5.) The enemies are frequently nations (e.g., Psalms 18:43 [44]; 20:21; 28; 61; 63; 89; 144).
- 6.) The royal interpretation gives integrity to psalms that otherwise lack unity (see Ps. 4).
- 7.) "The only 'situation' that is certainly attested is that of the king; . . . he is the subject in a number of psalms, and the dispute is only about how many. This cannot be said of the other suggested usages."¹²
- 8.) The representative character of the king explains the special problem presented by the psalms where 'I' (i.e., the king) and 'we' (i.e., the people/army) alternate (cf. 44, 60, 66; 75; 102).
- 9.) About twenty four motifs or expressions specifically appropriate for a king. Gunkel¹³ identified the following:
 - a.) All nations attend to his thanksgiving (18:49 [50]; 57:9 [10]; 118:46).
 - b.) Deliverance has vast repercussions (22:27-31 [28-32]);
 - c.) Invokes a world-judgment to rectify his cause (7:7-8);
 - d.) Depicts himself as victorious over the nations through God's intervention (118:10);
 - e.) Like a bull raising horns in triumph (92:10).¹⁴
- 10.) If by a king why not "by David"

¹² J. H. Eaton, *Kingship and the psalms* (Naperville, Ill. : Allenson, 1976), p. 22.

¹³ H. Gunkel, *Einleitung in die Psalmen die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1933), pp. 147f.

¹⁴ Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, pp. 20-26

D. Historical Notices

1. Time of Exile (1 Samuel 16-31) Psalms 34, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 142
2. Time of Under Blessing (2 Samuel 1-10): Psalms 18, 60
3. Time of Under Wrath (2 Samuel 11:20): Psalms 3, 51, 63.
4. Psalms 7 and 30 are unclassified
5. Why, if additions are secondary, are the remaining fifty-nine Davidic psalms left without historical notices, especially when many of them could have been easily ascribed to some event in David's life?¹⁵ Also, why would later editors introduce materials in the superscripts of Psalms 7, 30, and 60, which are not found in historical books and not readily inferred from the psalms themselves? Finally, why should it be allowed that psalms in the historical books contain superscripts with historical notices (cf. Ex. 15:1; Deut. 31:30 (cf. 32:44); Judg. 5:1; 2 Sam. 22:1; Jon. 2; Isa. 38:9), but not in the collection of psalms, even though the syntax is sometimes similar (*b^e* + infinitive cstr.)?

III. Conclusion

Against the prevalent skepticism of academics regarding the originality, and so the veracity, of the Psalm's superscripts, both the universal tradition of Davidic authorship and empirical evidence support the notion that *l^ed/-/wi/-/d* means "by David," that David authored the psalms attributed to him and that the historical notices that associate fourteen psalms with his career are credible. Lacking superscripts, one can infer from the psalms' contents that Psalm 107, 126, 137 were composed after the Exile.

It is unwise, however, to reconstruct the historical background where none is given in a superscript or overly to emphasize it and/or to pit it against other approaches, such as the form critical approach. Most of the psalms, including those in which an author is identified, are written in abstract terms, not with reference to specific historical incidences, so that others could use them in their worship. In sum, an accredited exegesis includes in its tool box the traditional approach to the superscripts' notice about their authors and historical circumstance.

¹⁵ Gleason Leonard Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago, Moody Press, 1964), p. 28).