

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

**PayPal**

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Irish Biblical Studies* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_ibs-01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ibs-01.php)

*BATACH* in the Book of the Psalms.

Rev. Dr. Ofofu Adutwum

The Book of Psalms is the one Book in the Old Testament in which  $\Pi\Omega\Omega$  occurs most frequently. Before we enter into the study of the word in this Book, however, we would like to make a very brief mention of the literary types (*Gattungen*) which have been discovered in the Psalms, as well as to remind ourselves of the place of the Psalms in the life of Israel.

II

It was Gunkel who, in the early part of this century, first drew attention to the literary peculiarities of the Psalms, as well as to their cultic importance in the life of the Israelites. In his opinion the Psalms consist of types which are distinguishable from one another. There are major types and minor types. Under the major types he lists the following:

- 1 Hymn: 8; 19; 29; 33; 65; 67; 68; 135; 146; 150 etc.
- 2 Lament of the Community: 44; 74; 80; 83.
3. Royal Psalm: 2; 18; 20; 21; 45; 72; 101; 110; 132; etc.
- 4 Lament of the Individual: 3; 5-7; 13; 22; 25; 26; 28; 31; 41; 55-57; 71; 86; 140-143 etc.
5. Individual Song of Thanksgiving: 18; 30; 34;40:2-12; 92; 118;etc.

Under each of these major types are accommodated certain sub-types which are found to be related to them. These are:

- 1 Hymn:
  - (a) Songs of Zion: 46; 48; 76; 84; 87
  - (b) Enthronement Psalms: 47; 95; 97; 99
  - (c) Certain 'liturgies' and mixed poems: 9:6-13;16f; 12:7-9; 36:6-10; 115:3-8 etc.
2. Lament of the Community: certain 'liturgies' and mixed poems: 9:18-21; 10:1-18; 12:2-5; 60:3-7; 11-14; 77:8-10 etc.
3. Lament of the Individual:
  - (a) Psalms of Confidence: 4; 11; 16; 23; 27:1-6; 62; 125; 131.
  - (b) Certain 'liturgies': 19:13f; 36:2-5; 11-13; 77:2-7 etc.
4. Individual Song of Thanksgiving:
  - (a) Some verses from the acrostic poems: 9:2-5; 119:7; 26a; 65; 71; 75; 92 etc.
  - (b) Verses which carry thanksgiving in the Laments: 7:18; 13:6; 22:23ff; 27:6 etc.

The minor types which Gunkel discovered include:

1. Wisdom Psalms: 1; 37; 49; 91; 112; 128
2. Songs of Pilgrimage: 122.
3. Torah Liturgy: 19:3; 42:8; 50:8; 14f; 22f; 65:9.
4. National Songs of Thanksgiving: 67; 124; 129.<sup>1</sup>

All these Psalm types, according to Gunkel, were cultic in origin and were associated with cultic situations. He was nevertheless of the opinion that most Psalms were freely composed and made the vehicle for the conveyance of the feelings and thoughts of their authors. They were marked by greater 'spirituality' than other similar cultic literature. One cannot be absolutely sure about the events in the life of Israel which gave birth to the Psalms.

It is however clear enough, he believed, that certain great national crises and individual personal experiences led to the composition of the Psalms to give expression to experienced distress, release and its accompanying joy, and the acknowledgement of the gracious sovereignty of God in the life of both the nation and individuals belonging to it.

Gunkel's approach to the Psalms was elaborated by Mowinckel. He shared the view that the Psalms were rooted in the worship of Israel. He however added that it was not enough to describe the forms and contents of Psalms from the point of view of *Gattungsforschung* and the history of literature. The cultic situation which lies behind them must be sought and set forth in all its complexity. This led him to the reconstruction of the New Year Festival an important part of which was said to be the Enthronement Festival of Yahweh. As in Babylonian religion the New Year Festival marked the enthronement of the god Marduk, so also in Israel Yahweh's enthronement was marked by the New Year Festivals. The great festal procession which marked Yahweh's victorious, coronation entry was the main event of the festival, and Yahweh's personal presence in the procession, it was assumed, was symbolised by the Ark. Mowinckel came to the conclusion that the situation in life (*Sitz im Leben*) of the Psalms was

---

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed summary of Gunkel's study in the Psalms cf. H. H. Rowley, ed., *The Old Testament and Modern study*, Oxford, 1961, pp. 162-207. Cf. also G. W. Anderson, ed., *Tradition and Interpretation*, Oxford, 1979, pp. 238-272; K. Koch, *The Growth of the Biblical Tradition*, London, 1969, pp. 159-182; Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, Atlanta, 1981.

the New Year Festival, and therefore assigned a large number of the Psalms to this Festival.<sup>2</sup>

In the view of Weiser the *Sitz im Leben* of the majority of the Psalms was to be found in the Covenant Festival of Yahweh. This covenant was celebrated at New Year, and the important aspect of it was the renewal of the covenant of Sinai. The Festival was celebrated not only for a spiritual purpose, but also to practically recall through it a historical tradition. It was as a result of the Festival, he asserted, that most of the Psalms came into being.<sup>3</sup>

Kraus, on the other hand, draws attention to the Royal Festival on Mount Zion. From 2 Sam 6, he says, it can reasonably be assumed that there was a cultic repetition of the event of bringing the Ark in solemn procession to Mount Zion with rejoicing, cultic dancing and sacrifices. It is clear from 1 Kgs. 8 and Ps. 132, he maintains, that the ascent of the Ark to Mount Zion was an act of worship of fundamental importance. The cultic repetition dealt not only with the election of Jerusalem, but also with the election of David (2 Sam 7). He sees the two sacred elements as intertwined in the cultic actualisation of the main facts concerning the official sanctuary in Jerusalem. The decisive evidence for the Festival, he asserts, is provided in Ps. 132 whose focal points are the election of David (vv 11ff) and the election of Jerusalem (v 13). His view, he says, supports and more accurately defines Gunkel's view of the Psalm in question as a pointer to a festival that was dedicated to the remembrance of the founding of the royal dynasty and its sanctuary. He would see the Festival as providing the setting for the Psalms.<sup>4</sup>

Westermann<sup>5</sup> on his part, takes the Song of Miriam (Ex 15), the Song of Deborah (Judges 5) and Isa 6:3 as the point of departure for the determination of the *Sitz im Leben* of the Psalms. In the first two passages, he says, praise is offered to God for his intervention in the history of Israel, and in the Isaianic passage praise springs from the revelation of God in the fullness of his being and action. He sees that in Israel worship is inextricably bound up with the history of God with his people and for this reason the *Gattungen* of the Psalms, he says, can be seen only in connection with that history. To him the *Gattungen* of the Psalms are not first and

---

<sup>2</sup> cf. S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* I, Oxford 1962, pp. 106-192.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A. Weiser, *The Psalms*. London, 1962, pp. 27-52.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. H. -J. Kraus, *Worship in Ancient Israel*, Oxford, 1966, pp. 183ff.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. his *Das Leben in den Psalmen*, Göttingen, 41968, pp. 11-19.

foremost or in the main literary and cultic categories. They are rather a description of the fundamental ways of what man does by word of mouth in the direction of God - Entreaty and Praise. He thus maintains that the *Sitz im Leben* of the Psalms is to be seen in the basic event in the 'cult' which proceeds from man to God: 'Das polare Geschehen des Reden zu Gott als Flehen und als Loben Dies ist der eigentliche 'Sitz im Leben' für die Psalmen.'<sup>6</sup>

It is clear that, in spite of the one scholar or the other preferring to see this or that festival or event as that which provided the setting for the Psalms, they are not divided in the opinion that the Psalms are rooted in the worship of Israel. It should be clear to us, therefore, that  $\text{הַלְלוּ}$  is a word which was found important for the verbal articulation of the attitudes and feelings of the people of Israel in the context of worship. With this we take up the consideration of the word in the Psalms.

### III

In the Psalms  $\text{הַלְלוּ}$  is met in the following Psalm types:

- Hymn
- Psalm of Thanksgiving
- Lament
- Royal Psalm
- Wisdom Psalm

It occurs nine times in the Hymn, five times in the Psalm of Thanksgiving, twenty-three times in the Lament, once in the Royal Psalm and seven times in the Wisdom Psalm.

In the Hymn  $\text{הַלְלוּ}$  is found in the hymnic introduction (146:3),<sup>7</sup> in the main hymnic section (9:11; 115:8,9,10,11; 155:18) and in the hymnic conclusion (35:21; 84:13).

In the Psalm of Thanksgiving it is found in the main section of the Psalm (32:10; 40:4; 41:10; 118:8,9).

In the Lament it occurs in the expression of confidence (Ps 22:5,6,10; 27:3; 31:5; 44:7; 52:10; 55:24; 56:4,5,12; 125:1), in petition (25:2; 86:2; 143:8), in protestation of innocence (26:1; 31:7), in exhortation (4:6;

---

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid* pp. 116-118.

<sup>7</sup> The verse numberings are those of the Hebrew Old Testament.

62:9,11), in the expression of the certainty of having been heard (28:7), in the conclusion of the lament (13:6).

In the Royal Psalm it occurs in the statement of the ground for the divine favours to the king (21:8). It expresses an essential element in the preconditions of the divine favours to the king. In the Wisdom Psalm it is used in the contexts of imperatives by which exhortations are made (37:1,5), in the context of the presentation of the upright man (112:7), in the context of the exaltation of the *Torah* (119:42). In Ps 91 it occurs as an element of confession which emerges from divine protection (v.2). In 49:7 it occurs in the thematic sentence of the Psalm. It also occurs in the context of the narration of the salvation history (78:22). In all the references, except in 41:10; 44:7; 49:7; 115:8; 118:8,9; 135:18; 146:3 Yahweh is the subject of  $\text{רָצַח}$ . The motive of it is the acknowledgement of Yahweh as:

The height which offers security (9:10)  
succour (35:20; 115:9,10,11)  
defence (28:7; 33:20; 84:13; 115:9,10,11)  
strength (28:7)  
Protection (27:1; 52:9)  
ovation (27:1; 25:5)  
light (27:1)  
truth and faithfulness (31:6)  
refuge (62:9; 91:2)  
stronghold (91:2)  
hiding place (32:7)

In other places  $\text{רָצַח}$  is motivated by the manifold blessings experienced from Yahweh, including splendour and majesty (21:2ff), renewal of inner strength (40:4); by the confession of Yahweh as holy and enthroned upon the praises of Israel (22:4);\* by the consciousness of Yahweh's choice of the godly (4:4); by his unflinching sustaining power (55:23); by his goodness (86:5); by his faithfulness and righteousness (143:1).<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Cf. A. A. Anderson, *Psalms (1-72)*, London, 1972, p. 187; Kraus, *Psalmen 1-59*, Neukirchen, <sup>5</sup>1978, p. 326 for Israel's understanding of 'praise'. Cf. A. A. Anderson, *Psalms (1.72)*, London, 1972, p. 187; Kraus, *Psalmen 1.59*, Neukirchen,

<sup>9</sup> cf. Weiser, *Op.cit.* p. 819; Kraus, *Psalmen 60-150*, Neukirchen, <sup>5</sup>1978, p. 1117 for comments on the two terms in their context.

In the Hymn and the Song of Thanksgiving these conceptions and confessions are presented as having their practical proofs in the deliverance, healing and protection which have been experienced from Yahweh. They are celebrated in praise and thanksgiving to Yahweh to bring him the glory and honour due to him as one who demonstrates his saving grace through them and lets himself be known and confessed through them. In the Lament the conception and confessions are resorted to win strength, steadfastness and courage in the midst of distress and fatal danger to existence, to keep faith in Yahweh and wait for his saving grace which will confirm these conceptions and confessions. The Wisdom teacher exhorts them to present Yahweh to his disciple as the very ground of life on whom the disciple is to depend for a safe guide through life and the true understanding of it.

חַטָּבָה is employed in all the Psalm types, on the strength of the conceptions and confessions, to maintain commitment to Yahweh and the sense of security in him, or to call to commitment to him and a sense of security in him.

There are a few references noted above in which חַטָּבָה has an object other than Yahweh. In the cases in question חַטָּבָה has as its object

- idols (115:8; 135:18)
- men of standing (118:8,9; 146:3)
- abundant wealth (52:9)
- act and gain of oppression (62:1)
- bow (44:7)
- wealth (49:7)
- an intimate (41:10)

Of all these cases it is only in the last one that חַטָּבָה conveys a positive sense. There it makes it clear that חַטָּבָה is a necessary factor in human relationships. It is important for human intercourse, for it belongs to the vital elements which create healthy human co-existence and fellowship. Its source is traced back to an act of Yahweh in the early life of man (Ps.22:10).<sup>10</sup> It is thus seen as an essential God-given equipment for human existence and interaction.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> cf. A. Cohen, *The Psalms*, 1950, pp. 62-63.

<sup>11</sup> The translations make it appear that the verse is concerned with the benefit which the Psalmist received in his youth from Yahweh. Cf. RSV, JB, NEB. Cf. also M. Dahood, *Psalms 1-50*. New York, 1900, pp. 136, 139; Kraus, op.cit. p.321; *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament I* (TWAT) pp. 609-610. E. T. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament II*, (TOOT) pp. 88-89.

In the other cases **אָבִיבִּי** conveys a negative sense.<sup>12</sup> In 118:8, 9 it is made comparatively less important than **אָבִיבִּי**, seek refuge, the object of which is Yahweh. The context makes it clear that the two verbs are related in meaning. They share the idea of looking to one as a means of security. Through his experience of Yahweh (vv.5b, 6a, 7a, 13b, 14) the Psalmist is convinced that the act of counting on one for security will be wrongly directed if man is made the object of it, for even the most powerful man is weak before Yahweh. In 146:3 the act is prohibited in the direction of man, irrespective of his power and standing. He is no source of salvation. Similarly **אָבִיבִּי** in connection with idols (115:8; 135:18), extortion (62:11) and instrument of military power (44:7), is frowned upon. It creates an attitude which denies Yahweh as the ground of existence and the source of security.

The presupposition of all these is that **אָבִיבִּי** in the sense in which we are made to see it here, is improper in human relationship, or in connection with things, irrespective of their quality and value, for it discloses a reverential element which the nature of man and of things does not allow any of them to deserve.

Parallel to **אָבִיבִּי** in some of its contexts in the Psalms are the expressions

- pouring out the heart (62:9)
- rejoicing of the heart (13:6)
- crying (22:6)
- not wavering (26:1)
- lifting up the soul (25:1; 143:8)
- boasting (49:7)
- having faith (78:22)
- fearing (40:4)
- sacrificing (4:6)
- the heart not fearing (27:3)
- refuge (52:9)
- not fearing (56:5,12)
- not becoming vain (62:11)

They enable us to see that **אָבִיבִּי** has a rich content of meaning, ranging from an objective act of positive self-surrender to a subjective condition of a strong sense of security and stability. We are led to see that

---

<sup>12</sup> cf. *TWAT*, I, p. 60. ET *TDOT*, II p. 89.



it indicates total self-dedication to Yahweh (25:1; 143:8; 78:22; 37:5).  $\text{קָרַב}$  , cry, (22:6) and  $\text{קָרַב}$  , sacrifice, (4:6) indicate it as an act which is not without an element of pain and cost.<sup>13</sup> The spirit of willingness and deliberate decision belongs to its nature (62:9) as well as reverence (40:4). It contains elements which create courage (27:3; 56:12), stability (26:1, cf. 21:8; 52:10a, 125:1), joy (13:6) and prevent vanity (62:11). In two cases where it indicates human attitude to wealth (49:7; 52:9) we are made to see it as carrying elements of boasting and strength. These are viewed derogatorily.

$\text{קָרַב}$  is also employed against the background of expressions such as

- seeking (9:11)
- gladness (33:21)
- friend of peace (RSV: bosom friend)
- eating one's bread (41:10)
- doing good: 'shepherding' faithfulness (37:3)
- blessedness (84:13)
- firmness of heart (112:7)
- salvation (13:6; 44:7; 78:22; 86:2)
- steadfast love (21:8; 26:3; 32:10; 14:8)

Like those terms and expressions paralleled with it, which we have noticed above, they fall within the semantic field of  $\text{קָרַב}$  . They form, as it were, a halo around  $\text{קָרַב}$  and help us to see further elements of meaning in it. They enable us to see that  $\text{קָרַב}$  contains elements of seeking (9:11), gladness (33:21) and firmness (114:7). It effects peace and optimism (22:6; 25:2); it leads to approval and acceptance (84:13) and brings one into the sphere of the divine grace (21:8; 32:10; 143:8), deliverance, healing and welfare (13:6; 44:7; 78:22; 86:2).

It is also to be noted that  $\text{קָרַב}$  is employed in some cases against a background which is strongly marked by a pronounced emphasis on the Temple or Zion as the dwelling place of Yahweh with which the conception of him observed above are associated (9:12; 27:4; 52:10; 78:68,69; 84:2,3; 5;118; 19:20; 135:2). It is the sacred place with which Yahweh is connected in a special way, so that it is seen as the place which 'houses' his presence in a special way (IKgs 8:27ff) and from where his word, his help

---

<sup>13</sup> Cp . Kraus, op.cit., p. 326.

and his blessing stream forth to his people.<sup>14</sup> It is a supernatural source of power, power which is very much concerned with the normal welfare of men.<sup>15</sup> The eyes of **בַּטַח** are directed to the Temple as the seat of the one who is the ground of existence and on whom man should count for security.

#### IV

Beside **בַּטַח** two of its nominal derivatives occur in the Psalms, **לְבַטֵּחַ** and **מִבְטָח**. Each of them occurs three times. The former is used in all its three occurrences adverbially to modify **יָשָׁב**, dwell, (4:9), **שָׁכַן** dwell, (16:9), **נָחַה**, guide (78:53). In 4:9, in the light of the Psalmist's confession of Yahweh as the sole source and sustainer of life, it indicates a condition of existence which ensures security and the sense of commitment to Yahweh.

In 16:9 it indicates a similar condition of existence. Here, however, it stands against the background of the Psalmist's exclusive consciousness of Yahweh's presence with him. The divine favour to him does not only ensure his stability and security, it also brings him to dedicate himself to Yahweh.

In 78:53 the substantive is used to describe the condition of safety which Yahweh's kind guidance and direction ensured to the people of Israel on their exodus from Egypt.<sup>16</sup> In all the three references it is commonly testified that the condition of existence which **לְבַטֵּחַ** describes is an act of Yahweh.

The second substantive, **מִבְטָח**, is directly linked with Yahweh. In 65:6 its content is made clear by **יְשׁוּעָנוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ**, 'the God of our salvation'. Yahweh is the God who is concerned with the safety and welfare of his people and acts in the context of *Gemeinschaftstreue* to ensure these to them. **מִבְטָח** thus indicates him as the object on whom they can count for their safety and welfare.

---

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Kraus, *Theologie der Psalmen*, Neukirchen, 1979, pp.88ff.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. R.E. Clements. *God and Temple*. Oxford. 1965, p. 67.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Kraus, op.cit., 710; Anderson, *Psalms (73-150)*, London, 1981, p. 573; Weiser, op.cit., p. 542.

In 40:5 מְבֹטָח stands in the light of אֲשֶׁרִי.<sup>17</sup> It makes it clear that the person who claims Yahweh as מְבֹטָח enters into a state of happiness, he is approved and accepted by Yahweh.<sup>18</sup> Yahweh is thus indicated through

מְבֹטָח as the dimension with life-promoting qualities worthy of a person's confidence.

In 71:5 מְבֹטָח is paralleled with תִּקְוָה,<sup>19</sup> which denotes an object of expectation. It lets us see מְבֹטָח as carrying an element of expectancy.<sup>20</sup> In v.6a Yahweh is confessed as the object of support. מְבֹטָח is thus used to indicate Yahweh as the reliable object in whom one can place one's confidence and live in happy expectancy. He is seen in all three cases as the sole reliable ground of existence to be looked to for security.

V

In comparison with the other Psalm types in which בְּטַח occurs, it is in the Lament that בְּטַח occurs most frequently. It occurs here, together with its nominal derivatives, לִבְטַח and מְבֹטָח, twenty-six times. Gerstenberger has observed that occasionally the personal statement of confidence occurs at the end of the Psalm (Ps, 55:24; 84:13), 'In der Regel aber ist sie Kernstück eines zum Klagelied gehörenden Formelements. der Vertrauensäußerung.'<sup>21</sup>

We observe however, that in Ps, 4:6; 62:9 בְּטַח occurs in the context of exhortation. In 26:1 it is linked with the protestation of innocence, and in 28:7 with the expression of the certainty of having been heard. In 4:9; 13:6 it occurs in the conclusion of the Psalm. In two cases it is used negatively (52:9; 62:11). In 25:2; 86:2 and 143:8 it is linked with petitions. It here conveys not only the dedication of the Psalmist to Yahweh, but also a confession of his innocence (31:7). It is only in 16:9; 22:5,6,10; 31:15; 44:7; 52:10; 56:4,5,12; 27:3; 71:5 that בְּטַח occurs in the form element 'expression of confidence'. It

<sup>17</sup> On the term cf. Westermann, *Forschung am Alten Testament*, München, 1974, pp. 191-195; TWAT I, pp.481. ET TDOT I, pp.445-448.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Westermann, *ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>19</sup> On it cf. W. Zimmerli, *Man and his Hope in the Old Testament*. London,(2nd edition) 1981; *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* II, pp. 521-523; *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible II*, pp. 640-641.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Zimmerli, *ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament I*, p.305.

occurs here twelve times, so that its importance in the form element cannot be denied. Its occurrences in the other section of the Lament, as noted above, as well as its absence in the majority of the Psalms of Lament with the form element in question (3; 5; 6; 7: 17; 39; 42:43; 54; 59; 61; 64; 69; 140:141) would not however let us make a rule out of the twelve occurrences in eight Psalms and see  $\text{𐌆𐌺𐌹}$  as the core of the Lament. Even in the so-called 'Psalm of Confidence', a sub-division of the Lament of which it is said 'Seine Keimzelle ist die Vertrauensäußerung'<sup>22</sup> it is clear that in some of the Psalms in this category  $\text{𐌆𐌺𐌹}$  does not occur (11; 23; 131). And in those in which it occurs, as pointed out above, it occurs twice in the form element 'expression of confidence'. In the other cases however it occurs in a statement of exhortation and in the conclusion of the Psalm. It could however be said, in the light of its relatively greater frequency in the Lament, that  $\text{𐌆𐌺𐌹}$  belongs to the central elements of the Lament. It is seen as one of the essential elements in the spiritual equipment of the Psalmist for his existential struggles.

Rev. Dr. Ofosu Adutwum,  
Department for the Study of Religions,  
University of Ghana,  
Legon. Ghana

---

<sup>22</sup> Cf. H. Junkel and J. Begrich, *Einleitung in die Psalmen*. Göttingen, 1933, p. 256,