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Such is the wonderful love of God, that he has come to us in Jesus Christ, and in Jesus assumed our life (the life of all men), underwritten our responsibilities, offered for us a life of worship and obedience and prayer to the Father, taken to himself our body of death, vicariously submitted for us to the verdict of "guilty," died our death and risen again in our humanity, so that by the grace of God, his life is our life, his death is our death, his victory our victory, his resurrection our resurrection, his righteousness our righteousness and his eternal prayers and self-offerings to the Father our prayers and offering in the presence of the Father. So we are accepted in the Beloved, and discover our status as sons.

By grace God gives us what he demands. We are accepted by God, not because we have offered worthy worship, but in spite of our unworthiness, because he has provided for us a Worship, a Way, a Sacrifice, a Forerunner in Christ our Leader and Representative, and our worship is our joyful Amen to that Worship. This is the heart of all true Christian worship. It is our response of faith to God's grace. So we worship God "through Jesus Christ our Lord," and pray "in the name of Jesus Christ."

JAMES B. TORRANCE, "THE PLACE OF JESUS CHRIST IN WORSHIP" IN *THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR MINISTRY*, RAY S. ANDERSON, ED. (GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN: EERDMANS, 1979), 352.

"Style" has become today's chief musical concern—not the text or its theology.

DON HUSTAD, *TRUE WORSHIP: RECLAIMING THE WONDER AND MAJESTY* (WHEATON, ILLINOIS: HAROLD SHAW PUBLISHERS AND HOPE PUBLISHING, 1998), 173.

WORSHIP IN THE PSALMS EXODUS 15 AND THE PRAISE OF GOD PART ONE

Ronald B. Allen

POETRY AND THE PHILISTINES

Years ago I began a book with what I thought would be a wonderful opening line. I wrote, "Only a Philistine could fail to love the Psalms."¹ Some people have made it a point to tell me they enjoyed this. One of the first was Dr. Robert B. Hughes, former professor of Biblical Literature, Western Seminary, Portland, Oregon. I still have his note congratulating me on this opening sentence. More recently, Dr. Charles R. Swindoll, president of Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas, introduced me in chapel by reading that sentence and expressing appreciation for it.² Now these are not small accolades! One could do worse than to be congratulated by an esteemed colleague (Dr. Hughes) and a revered boss (Dr. Swindoll)!

Unfortunately, however, I had overstated the case. In attempting to be clever, I misrepresented things. Lots of people do not love the Psalms! And not all of them are Philistines!³ And this is heartache to me.

I have had a deep appreciation for the beauty of roses for several decades. My wife Beverly and I were once members of the Portland Rose Society. We joined the club to be with people of mutual interest. We also believed this would afford us opportunities to learn about roses and their care, and also to share the love of the Master Gardener in the hearing of those who love his handiwork, but who do not always know to attribute beauty to him.

I have also had a life-long love for music. This is a part of growing up in the home of a musician. My range in musical tastes is wide, from swing and jazz to classical, including grand opera.⁴ Beverly shares a love of music with me. Our first date, more than forty years ago(!), was at what was optimistically billed "The First Annual Dixieland Jazz Concert" in the Hollywood Bowl in southern California. In later years we often paid dearly for season tickets for the Portland Opera. Further, I worked for a couple of years as an announcer at the classical music station in Dallas, WRR FM, where I was paid to listen to and to comment briefly on some of the most wonderful music in the western world.

And the point? My love for music and for roses is so strong, and is so much a part of me, that I do not know how to respond with sufficient grace when someone says he really has no interest in roses, or that the symphony leaves him cold, or that grand opera might as well be from another planet. What? Not love roses? Not love classical music?⁵ Not enjoy long bicycle rides? Not enjoy mountain hiking? No interest in bow hunting? And so I recite my great loves.

Even worse, they may say they really do not love the Psalms. Next, I fear, someone may say to me that she has no interest in seeing another picture of my grandchildren!

Pastors who are widely known as expositors of the Bible have told me they have trouble reading the Psalms. People who are experienced in narrative literature tell me they simply have never really warmed up to a poem. Students at theological seminaries have told me from time to time that they find the reading of the Psalms simply leaves them cold. I will let the dirty secret out. I have even been told by more than one seminary professor that one finds my great love for the Psalms to be somewhat curious. And once I was told by Don Wyrzten, himself a certifiable lover

of the Psalms,⁶ that a well-known writer of Christian books decried to him the fact that I had written "another book on the Psalms." His complaint? "The Psalms are 'pre-Christian,' showing evidence of people not living lives controlled by the Spirit." Gasp.

So, at long last, I need to amend my opening line. Instead of saying, "Only a Philistine can fail to love the Psalms," the line must now be read: "Only a Philistine (along with lots of pastors, untold numbers of lay people, and an ever increasing number of seminary students) can fail to love the Psalms." Sigh.

But, perhaps for you, dear reader, there is an opportunity for a shared experience of joy in this article and in its successor. In this series we enter into the world of the Psalms through the front door. We will linger together in a study of the first Psalm of the Bible.

THE FIRST PSALM IN THE BIBLE

The first Psalm of the Bible is not Psalm 1. Actually, Psalm 1, a wisdom poem, may have been written rather late in Israel's experience and have been added to the beginning of the Book of Psalms as a gateway of wisdom themes. We observe that Psalm 1 does not have a superscription (nor does Psalm 2); whereas most of the psalms of Book 1 (Psalms 1-41) do have these,⁷ and all which do are attributed to David.⁸

The first Psalm of the Bible is a Psalm of Moses and it is not in the Book of Psalms at all. It has pride of place in the Book of Exodus, following immediately on the conclusion of the greatest event in the course of Hebrew Scripture, God's redemption of his people, Israel, from the land of Egypt. The prose account is in Exodus 14; the resultant Psalm of Praise is found in Exodus 15. There are thus "two witnesses" to this most significant event.⁹

We are accustomed to thinking of David as the sweet

singer of Israel. Few people also think of Moses when they think of music, praise and worship in the biblical record. But Moses has pride of place as being not only the one through whom Yahweh gave his gracious gift of Torah; Moses is also the first one to write poetry and music for the nation Israel to use in its worship of the living God. In addition to the Psalm of the Sea (Exodus 15), Moses also wrote what we call "The Psalm of Moses" (Deuteronomy 32), "The Blessing of Moses" (Deuteronomy 33), and "The Old Man's Complaint" (Psalm 90).¹⁰

The climactic event of the Exodus is in the miracle of Israel's crossing of the dry bed of the Red Sea,¹¹ and the subsequent drowning of Israel's enemies by the resurgent waters. Shortly after seeing their enemies perish, and coming to the realization that at long last they were free from Egypt forever, they began to sing in grand worship of the living God. The poem they sang is the Psalm of the Sea, Exodus 15. Here are some salient points:

- Exodus 15 is the first Psalm of Praise in the Bible!
- Exodus 15 celebrates the greatest act of God in the course of Hebrew Scripture, the deliverance of Israel from Egypt.
- Exodus 15 is a Psalm of Moses, with the music led by Miriam.
- Exodus 15 is sung by the believing community.

They have seen the mighty acts of God.

They now respond in fear to God.

They now commit in faith to God.

They now respond in grateful worship to God.

The fact that this is the first Psalm in the Bible is remarkable. A common principle in Bible interpretation is to use the first occurrence of a biblical theme as the basic

teaching platform for that theme. This is the first time in the Bible that we read of the corporate worship of the people of God. There are descriptions of worship of the patriarchs in the Book of Genesis, of course, beginning in Genesis 12.¹² But it is not until we come to the events of the Book of Exodus that we have the redeemed nation of Israel, and it is not until we come to Exodus 15 that we have the first act of corporate worship in the company of the redeemed.

This fact cannot be minimized. With all that the Bible has to say concerning worship in sacrifice (and, without any attempt to minimize the importance of the sacrificial system), it is staggering to realize that the first worship event in Israel was in music and song. This is celebrative worship in response to God's great work in effecting their deliverance.

In the second article in this series I will present the heart of the Psalm and its meaning for Christian worship. This introductory article is designed to play at the edges, to tease here and there. So I raise a few questions. Where did Moses learn to write poetry? What models might he have had? Where did Moses learn to craft music? What patterns might he have used? Where did Miriam learn to play an instrument? What type of instrument did she play? Where did she and the women learn to dance? And what type of dancing did they do?

To raise these questions is to answer them. Moses was trained in all of the arts of the Egyptians. Stephen proclaimed concerning Moses: "And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds" (Acts 7:22, NKJV). Moses had been taught skills of warfare and administration, poetry and art. His was the finest training that the ancient world could have afforded. God had placed him in the inner circle of Pharaoh's family so that Israel's future leader would have every advantage a

superior education could provide. Among the things he learned were poetry, music and art.

When it was time to praise God on the “dry” side of the Red Sea, Moses did not have to craft musical theory, develop the idea of poetry, manufacture new instruments and inaugurate song. Miriam’s friends did not have to learn to pluck the strings of unfamiliar instruments. She did not sit in the dust and construct a timbrel. She and her friends did not need to draw dance steps in the sand and then learn to use them.

Music, poetry and art were already theirs because they had learned to do them in Egypt. It was Egyptian musical style and instrumentation that Moses and Miriam used on that day. It was their training in Egypt that gave to them the forms and patterns that they might use in their worship of God who had delivered them from Egypt. The same would later be true of David. He used Canaanite patterns of song, Canaanite instruments and Canaanite melodies when he began to write music in praise of the living God.

Israel never developed her musical, poetic or instrumental tradition in a vacuum. The great artists, creative poets and imaginative writers in Israel learned from the larger cultures about them, and then adapted the best from their neighbors to use in the praise of God. The message of Israel was unique. Her focus on the one true God was not borrowed; it was revealed. Israel received the words of God. But in her worship of God, Israel was directed by God’s Spirit to employ the musical and poetic modes of her neighbors. The church has always followed suit.

THE OUTLINE OF EXODUS 15

Here is an outline of the magnificent Psalm of the Sea (Exodus 15), adapted from Dr. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., in his fine commentary on the Book of Exodus.¹³

There are three keys to understanding the flow of the

Psalm: (1) the first is in the similes Moses uses: “like a stone” (v. 5b), “like lead” (v. 10b), and “like a stone” (v. 16a); (2) the second is in the two time distinctions: the retrospective (vv. 1b-10) and the prospective (vv. 11-18); and (3) the third is in the concept of the introit (vv. 1b, 6, 11, 16b). When each of these is considered, then, following Kaiser, we have a wonderful analysis of this Psalm that looks like this.

OUTLINE OF EXODUS 15: THE PSALM OF THE SEA

Retrospective: Yahweh’s overthrow of the Egyptian forces (vv. 1b-10)

Strophe I verses 1b-5

Part A: Introit—verse 1b: “I will sing to the Lord”

Part B: Confession—verses 2-3

Part C: Narration—verses 4-5

Concluding simile: “like a stone” (verse 5b)

Strophe II verses 6-10

Part A: Introit—verse 6: “Your right hand, O Lord”

Part B: Confession—verses 7-8

Part C: Narration—verses 9-10

Concluding simile: “like lead” (verse 10b)

Prospective: Yahweh’s plan to bring Israel into the Promised Land (vv. 11-18)

Strophe III verses 11-16a

Part A: Introit—verse 11: “Who . . . is like you, O Lord?”

Part B: Confession—verses 12-13

Part C: Anticipation—verses 14-16a

Concluding simile: “as a stone” (verse 16b)

Strophe IV verses 16b-18

Part A: Introit—verse 16b: “Until your people pass by, O Lord”

Part B: Confession—verse 17

Part C: Anticipation—verse 18

POETRY AND THE EGYPTIANS

With the introductory elements now behind us, we will be ready in the next article to develop the worship themes in “The Song of the Sea.” Israel’s first song was a joyful response to the living God for delivering them from their greatest foe, the nation of ancient Egypt.

So let us go back to the beginning. Only a Philistine and an ancient Egyptian could fail to love the Psalms!

Author

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Notes

1. Ronald B. Allen, *Praise: A Matter of Life and Breath* (Nashville, Tennessee: Nelson, 1980), 17. Reprint edition; *And I Will Praise Him: A Guide to Worship in the Psalms* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel, 1999), 17.
2. Dr. Swindoll also put me on notice, in a way. He said that he expected similar “great lines” from me in the future. Ouch.
3. Those who responded well to the line understood that the term “Philis-

tine” works both historically for those who were enemies of David (and thus of God)—that is, the ancient Aegean/Cretan “Sea People” group who had settled on the south coast of Canaan at c. 1200 B.C.—as well as critically as a term to describe those moderns who are not sensitive to art, literature and music. The former use of the term “Philistine” can be observed in any standard Bible encyclopedia article. See, e.g., J. C. Moyer, “The Philistines,” in Merrill C. Tenney and Steven Barabas, eds., *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1974), IV M-P, 762-73. The latter is seen in English usage from as early as 1687 when Dryden wrote, “Times are mended well / Since late among the Philistines you fell.” See *The Oxford English Dictionary*, VII N-POY, 776. I know this is being rather pedantic, but after twenty years it is worth the time finally to explain my little joke to those of my friends who seemed not to have gotten it! But then, they are not likely to read this footnote either, I suppose! Actually, Moyer, in his article on the Philistines in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, says that the disparaging use of the term Philistine as one who is deficient in cultural acumen is an error, as the Philistines of the early Old Testament times were clearly of a superior material and organizational culture than the people of Israel (p. 772). No matter; they were the enemies of David and the enemies of God. They would not have loved the Psalms that came from their nemesis David.

4. But not always extending to the Grand Ole Opry! When I began working on a grand project for the Thomas Nelson Company in Nashville some years ago, one of the editors said to me, “Since you will be in Nashville on several occasions on the project, we have decided to give you tickets to the Grand Ole Opry this weekend. No one who comes to Nashville should miss this. Then again, no one should be made to go more than once!” As a matter of fact, I enjoyed the experience greatly—the first time, and the second.
5. Years ago I wrote an article for the then *Moody Monthly* on the topic of classical music. I had been given the title: “So You Think You Hate the Symphony?” My editor told me to rewrite it until I could convince him that he might like to attend the symphony—something he said was not likely to happen easily!
6. He has written a very informative book on the Psalms. See Don Wyrzten, *A Musician Looks at the Psalms* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1991).
7. Besides Psalms 1 and 2, only Psalms 10 and 33 of the Psalms of Book 1 lack a superscription. Psalm 10 was originally the conclusion of Psalm 9. See Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald B. Allen, H. Wayne House, eds., *The Nelson Study Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Nelson, 1997), 884. Similarly, Psalm 43 was originally the conclusion of Psalm 42 (*Nelson Study Bible*, 922). Psalm 2 is attributed to David in Acts 4:24-26.
8. The superscriptions of the Psalms were not part of the poems as originally written, but I believe them to be reliable guides to attribution. They contain many intriguing elements relating to the music of the Old

Testament world. The Spirit of God was able (!) to work in the editorial work of the Psalms as well as in the writing of these poems. The superscriptions are a part of the Psalms as we have received them. Further, they are superscriptions, not postscripts, as has been suggested from time to time.

9. This is really wonderful. On occasion in the Bible we see a principle that a very important event will be recorded twice, following, perhaps, the biblical mandate that a thing will be established by two or three witnesses (see Deut. 17:67). Think, for example, of the bread and the cup in Christian communion. The bread stands for the broken body of the Lord, a symbol of his death. The cup stands for the shed blood of the Lord, a symbol of his death. Both bread and cup actually speak of the same thing: the Savior has died for the sins of his people. By having two symbols that speak of the same thing, we see again the idea of two witnesses establishing a matter.
10. Psalm 90 begins in words of praise (vv. 1-2), but soon shows itself to be a lament of the aged Moses who realizes that his life is about done and who knows that he will never achieve his greatest dream, entry into the Promised Land. In the course of the poem, he comes to terms with life as it is, in the hand of God. See my development in the notes of *The Nelson Study Bible* (973-74).
11. It is not germane to the argument of this article, but you may wish to know that the several traditional views of where the crossing took place have all seemed unsatisfactory for several reasons, as has the traditional location of the mountain of God, Mount Sinai. Two adventurers have proposed alternative sites for the crossing of the Red Sea (Heb. *yam suph*, "sea of reeds") and for Mount Sinai. Bob Cornuke and Larry Williams made a clandestine visit to a mountain known as Jabal at Lawz in Saudi Arabia, just east of the southernmost extension of the Sinai Peninsula. They make quite a case (albeit, anecdotally) for the legitimacy of their discovery. In addition, they discovered, and even walked on, a portion of a submerged land bridge across the water of the eastern arm of the Red Sea (today called the Gulf of Aqaba; called *yam suph* in Num. 21:4) that may have been the means God used for the crossing of his people in ancient times. See the book on this modern adventure by Howard Blum, *The Gold of Exodus: The Discovery of the True Mount Sinai* (New York: Pocket Books, 1999). Scholars are not likely to be impressed with the details of a book that reads something like a script for a new Indiana Jones thriller. Yet, the discovery of many of the greatest "finds" in biblical archaeology began with amateurs poking about in areas where the scholars had not yet begun to look. This may turn out to be another example.
12. It is remarkable that the acts of Abram (later Abraham) in offering sacrifices to Yahweh in Canaan were preaching opportunities for him to give witness to his new faith in a hostile, pagan environment! When Abram offered sacrifices, he did not use altars in pagan temples, with which Canaan abounded. Outside of the ancient city of Shechem he built his

new altar, even though Shechem had altars aplenty. By refusing to use existing altars, Abram must have drawn quite a crowd to observe his worship of the living God. In Genesis 12:8, Abram built an altar between Bethel and Ai, and then he "called on the name of the Lord" (NKJV). This was not private prayer! The Hebrew expression means "to make proclamation" and should be contrasted with the language for prayer ("to call to the Lord"). These are acts of evangelistic worship. Abram had the first ever "seeker services"! See the notes at these verses in *The Nelson Study Bible* (p. 26).

13. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "Exodus," in Frank E. Gaebelein and Richard P. Polcyn, eds., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1990), 2:393.