

(7) THE ROYAL PSALMS / ENTHRONEMENT

As with the psalms of confidence or trust, the royal psalms do not show an inherent or particular structure. What is unifying in these psalms is the use of the royal image. A distinction can be drawn in the use of the kingly image between the secular king and the Lord's kingship. The latter psalms are identified as the Enthronement psalms. Sigmund Mowinckel sees the cultic setting that would have formed the backdrop for the majority of the psalms in a great New Year Festival in autumn in which YHWH was celebrated as the enthroned king of the universe in the temple of Jerusalem. The reasons that he postulates for such a position are: a) the number of psalms that refer explicitly to kingship and to YHWH's kingship, b) the testimony in the Mishnah that a New Year Feast was celebrated, c) the corroboration of this Feast in Babylon and in Ugarit. Some presuppositions in these proofs are questionable. Mowinckel gives priority to the theology of kingship over against priority to the theology of covenant. And this we shall see is probably the most crucial issue to unravel for determining the cultic setting of the psalms.

To what extent did the theology of the monarchy break with covenant theology or to what extent did the theology of the monarchy give expression to and build on the mosaic covenant tradition? Secondly, if in fact Israel celebrated a New Year Festival along the lines of Babylon and Ugarit, this would have been one celebration among many. To make this the central feast has no basis in the historical writings, nor in the Mishnah.

Artur Weiser in fact proposed a different cultic setting from which to interpret and understand the majority of the psalms - a festival of covenant renewal along the lines recorded in Joshua 24. The ark was the sign of the covenant which persisted until the destruction of Jerusalem 587 B.C. Covenant theology in fact is so comprehensive so as to be able to include the many types of prayer and praise of the psalter: celebrations of YHWH's theophany on Mount Sinai, proclamation of the divine name, recital of the saving acts of YHWH, proclamation of YHWH's covenant call for righteousness, communal purification, affirmation of God's supremacy, laments during pilgrimage journeys in preparation for renewal.

In distinction from Mowinckel, Weiser would claim there was some influence on this festival by the monarchy and by non-Israelite sources on divine creativity and divine kingship. But these influences were merely extensions of the formative image and reality of the covenant renewal.

Though Weiser's view is able to account for the various types of psalms more convincingly than Mowinckel, there remains the difficulty of the silence of such an important feast in the historical books. Weiser himself admits that evidence for a detailed reconstruction of the feast is lacking. Moreover, Weiser's explanation of monarchic theology being a minor extension of covenant theology does not do justice to the tension that exists in the texts between the monarchy and the old covenant realities. Finally what reason is there that would drive us to postulate one single cultic setting with which to explain the majority of the psalms?

Kraus tried to take into account the complexity of Israel's tradition and its varied cultic life in exploring the possible cultic settings for the psalms. The tent festival would have celebrated in conjunction with the Passover the themes of the exodus and the wilderness wanderings. A covenant festival would have celebrated the steadfast love of YHWH and a call to faithfulness of Israel. The traditions of Jerusalem would have appropriated Canaanite elements in mythology and in kingship through which YHWH is acclaimed as Lord over all. Kraus postulated a royal Zion festival which combined the choice of David's descendants and the choice of the city of Jerusalem (2S 6-7), (Ps 132).

Unlike Weiser then, Kraus gives due weight to the presence of the Davidic covenant and its associated motifs of kingship and Zion. Unlike Mowinckel, Kraus attributes basic significance in the Jerusalem cult to the designation of the Davidic dynasty as a sign of YHWH's presence among his people and his choice of Zion in which his presence was manifested. Finally Kraus argued that the enthronement psalms which celebrate YHWH as King with eschatological overtones was dependent on Second Isaiah 52:7-12

(Westermann p. 145). Mowinckel had envisaged the enthronement psalms as clear signs of a cultic festival along the lines of Babylon previous to the exile. Kraus would claim that these psalms are not a sign of a cultic drama borrowed from the Near- East. Rather, after the exile the original Zion festival was rendered meaningless, but was filled with new significance through the theology of Second Isaiah. The dawning of the Kingship of YHWH in Jerusalem, replaces the choice of the house of David.

The Canaanite Cultural Setting:

Israel defined itself over and against the contemporary culture in which it found itself. But it did so after having assimilated and integrated a great deal of this culture. The Akitu feast which was the re-enactment of creation in Babylon was a festive celebration throughout the Near-East. The creation myth, *The Enuma Elish*, would have been read during the celebration with various a re-enactment carried out in symbolic form. There was a procession on boats in Babylon to the Akitu house with the statues of the various gods. A marriage rite of the king would be re-enacted in which the god would be declared king in the person of the sovereign.

Finally there would be a return to the temple. What takes place in the myth of creation is understood exactly as what transpires in human history. In fact human history is the re-enactment of the myth. This myth was an explanation of what was taking place in the present. The victory of the god over chaos demanded a city and a temple as the home. The temple in the city kingdom was the earthly counterpart of the palace in the heavens in which the god who had conquered the forces of chaos presided over the divine assembly and from which he ruled the cosmos. The temple was built on a sacred mount. The king was the person from whom order extended to the fields and to the conquered territories of the central city. Kingship was lowered from heaven. Conquest and victory by an earthly king were extensions of the struggle and the victory of which the myth spoke. This was re-enacted dramatically in the Akitu festival.

Much of this mythic backdrop can be seen and recognized in the establishment of the monarchy. With the coming of David to Jerusalem, YHWH his God had become the God of the reigning king in a city kingdom. The Jebusites no doubt participated in the Near-Eastern mythic understanding of the world. To them this would have meant that YHWH was the one who had defeated the powers of chaos and death and who was responsible for life and order in the cosmos. David must have integrated some cultural elements of the Jebusites into his kingdom. He brought the ark into the city into a tent prepared for it, 2S6. The name of the priest, Zadok, who presumably was the priest in Jerusalem in pre-Davidic times, appears alongside Abiathar after David takes Jerusalem 2S8:17. Israel living out its destiny in Jerusalem only continued to exemplify the power of YHWH in the life of Solomon. The glorious temple was built as a fitting abode for the ark the sign of presence of YHWH among is people.

The victory of David caused a crisis in the theological view of Old Israel that lived its faith under the mosaic covenant commitment of Sinai. For some, especially for those of the northern kingdom, this new state of affairs which seemed to be too accommodating to Canaanite imagery was rebellion and apostasy (1 Sam 8, 2 Sam 15:1-6). The challenge to the older view cannot be underestimated. YHWH was Israel's God of the Exodus, God of the covenant. But was YHWH Lord in this new situation of sedentary life. The conditions under David were such that either YHWH was Lord over the cosmos or a minor' deity of a small but successful people (Guthrie 74). The northern kingdom kept alive vividly the mosaic tradition, but could not find a way to acclaim YHWH as sovereign over the setting in which Israel found herself.

The southern tradition integrated the mosaic covenant into the kingdom of David through God's choice of Zion and God's promise to David's dynasty. YHWH as the cosmic ruler designates the Davidic dynasty as his rulers. It is precisely the God of the mosaic covenant who showed power and steadfast love in the exodus, who now shows his power and steadfast love in bringing David victory over the Philistines and neighboring cultures. It is precisely because the Lord brought David and Israel victory over and against Philistine power that YHWH had proved to be ruler over the cosmos and that the original mosaic covenant was valid. God was the one present in time of need. The Davidic covenant is the ratification of the mosaic

covenant under different circumstances. The Davidic covenant did not supersede the Mosaic or eliminate it, rather it was an expression and a ratification of YHWH's steadfast love. With the fall of the kingdom, Israel continued to sing the royal and enthronement psalms but no longer in honour of an incumbent king but as hope for a messianic king, for righteousness and integrity.

Royal Psalms: 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132, 144.

The royal psalms employ royal imagery. These psalms can be prayers for the king, laments for the king in times of disaster. They can be marriage psalms on occasion of a wedding. They can sing praises to the covenant promised David.

Enthronement Psalms: 24, 47, 93, 95-100.

The enthronement psalms follow the genre of descriptive praise. In fact what they do is call others to praise God precisely in light of God's lordship over history and over the nations.

Zion Psalms: 46, 48, 68, 76, 84, 87, 122, 125.

The Zion psalms can fit into several categories because what is at stake in these psalms is the image of this special mountain of the Lord. They can be psalms of confidence when the mount is acclaimed as the refuge and strength of Israel. They can be laments if Zion is presented in its ravished state. They can be hymns when the call to praise is present in light of God's glory that shines in Zion.

Creation Psalms: 8, 89, 104, 148.

Covenant Psalms: 78, 81, 89, 132.