



This material has been provided by Asbury Theological Seminary in good faith of following ethical procedures in its production and end use.

The Copyright law of the united States (title 17, United States code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyright material. Under certain condition specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to finish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specific conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be *“used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research.”* If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of “fair use,” that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law.

By using this material, you are consenting to abide by this copyright policy. Any duplication, reproduction, or modification of this material without express written consent from Asbury Theological Seminary and/or the original publisher is prohibited.

Contact

B.L. Fisher Library
Asbury Theological Seminary
204 N. Lexington Ave.
Wilmore, KY 40390

B.L. Fisher Library’s Digital Content
place.asburyseminary.edu



Asbury Theological Seminary
205 North Lexington Avenue
Wilmore, Kentucky 40390

800.2ASBURY
asburyseminary.edu

REMEMBERING HISTORY, WORSHIPPING GOD

A Thesis presented to
the Faculty of Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
Master of Divinity

by

Katie Marie Heffelfinger

May 2003

THESIS APPROVAL

Brian D. Russell

Dr. Brian D. Russell

5-8-03

Date

Paul W. Chilcote

Dr. Paul W. Chilcote

5/8/07

Date

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1. Introduction	3
2. Psalm 77: Finding God in the Midst of Struggle	12
3. Psalm 78: Learning from the Lessons of the Past	22
4. When Israel Out of Egypt Came: God's Power Revealed Through History	34
5. Fight the Good Fight of Faith: Jesus the Divine Warrior	47
6. Conclusion	59

Chapter One

Introduction

“The temptation to absolutize the present moment always seeks to discount the connections between generations, between past and present, and between present and future.”¹ In this sense our consumerist culture’s fascination with what is current and what is immediately attainable is not far removed from the expressions of human nature throughout the centuries of human existence. This obsession with the present can be seen in the church particularly in the controversies surrounding worship. We do not wish to be seen as outdated for we are sure that the presumption that the church is not the most current thing going would be a death sentence to any evangelistic outreach.

MUSIC AND WORSHIP

Even in ancient times humans have associated worship of God and musical expression. The Bible gives testimony to such an association asserting that the people were called by Miriam and the other women on the banks of the Red Sea to respond to God in worship through song (Exodus 15:20). While the Psalter is certainly the most concentrated occurrence of human expressions of praise to the Lord through poetry and song; it is not the lone exemplar of this form. Throughout the Hebrew Bible historical narratives are punctuated by episodic singing to or about Yahweh. The song of Moses and the Israelites at the Sea (Ex. 15:1-18), Deborah’s song (Jdg. 5:1-31), and David’s frequent musical outbursts are just a few examples of the Old Testament’s permeation with music. Not only are these songs set within historical situations in their final canonical forms, they frequently recount the historical deeds of Yahweh as the method and materials of their praise.

THE ROLE OF WORSHIP AND THE LIFE OF FAITH

¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Abiding Astonishment: Psalms, Modernity and the Making of History* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 26.

Walter Brueggemann insists that the Psalms, “not only propose and constitute a world; they intend also to unmake, deconstruct, and unmask other worlds which seduce and endanger Israel, which are regarded in these recitals as false and destructive.”²

Brueggemann’s theory of world making in which he proposes that what we do in worship constructs and brings into being a world more in harmony with the expectations of the kingdom of God, sets out high goals for the role of worship in Christian life. We are to be world makers in worship, people who, through their song, “make available a very different world . . . for which the whole human community deeply yearns.”³ This heavy responsibility is not one left open to the whims of the community dominated by its focus on its own current situation. We are not left to determine what sort of world we will create in simple reaction to the changing circumstances of our lives. The world we are to create is specified for us by the Biblical canon. We are to be creating the kingdom of God, the rule and reign of God. We must be careful in our enactment of this responsibility to recount and recite our praise in ways that are faithful to the witness we have in the Old and New Testaments to the nature of God and the nature of our expectations regarding God’s reign.

SOME HELP FROM OUR PREDECESSORS

In light of the historically grounded nature of the Christian faith, it is pertinent to examine the ways in which the historical expressions of God’s nature may be and have been extolled in song. Through the course of the last several decades, Christian worship’s manner of expression has undergone drastic changes. Proponents of these changes have stressed the need for Christian worship to keep pace with the rapidly changing musical tastes and preferences of the largely unchurched masses⁴ while others express concern that

² Brueggemann, *Abiding Astonishment*, 26.

³ Walter Brueggemann, *Israel’s Praise: Doxology against Idolatry and Ideology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), xi.

⁴ Tim and Jan Wright, *Contemporary Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 11.

changes to worship's form not effect its necessary theological content.⁵ In addition to the ongoing conflict within the church over musical form, the incursion of post-modernity has added a difference in worldview to the widening gulf between the historical worship of the church and the worshippers themselves.⁶ Clearly, worship is at the heart of the common life of the people of God and cannot be abandoned or allowed to slip into the isolation of irrelevance. How can these hurdles be overcome? How can theological grounding and post-modern ways of viewing the world be united in songs which reflect the styles and lifestyles of the people of God today? Ironically, the answers to the problems of the church's future may lie in its past. Through examination of the ways in which worshippers of God have expressed their praise down through the centuries, this study aims to outline some means by which worship may retain its Biblical focus in the post-modern period regardless of the style of music to which it is set.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In order to closely examine historical expressions of praise of God and particularly those which extol the Lord for salvific acts in history, it will be necessary to assert that the particular hymns examined allude to the canon at specific points. For the purposes of this investigation we will be limiting our consideration to those hymns which allude to the Exodus narrative as recorded in the book of Exodus. In light of Schultz's trenchant critique of the current state of the study of intertextuality in Biblical Studies in which he notes that scholars frequently use such words as allusion, echo and intertextuality in a variety of different ways without clarifying the precise meaning with which they are applying these terms⁷ it seems appropriate to devote some space to a brief outline of the definitions and methodology which I will be employing in this study. The understanding

⁵ Robert Webber, *Planning Blended Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 28.

⁶ Webber, 14.

⁷ Richard L. Schultz, *The Search for Quotation: Verbal Parallels in the Prophets*. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 180 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 62.

of allusion which is to be employed in this investigation refers to those instances in which one text may be shown to refer implicitly in its language and style to another, older text with the goal of illuminating the alluding text's own message rather than expounding the meaning of the cited text as its primary purpose.⁸ This is an examination of relationships between texts which seeks to posit a level of intentionality on the part of the alluding author. In current Biblical Studies there has been a move by some to assert that the meaning of the text is solely dependent upon what the reader sees and interprets in the text. In opposition to this movement, our investigation will not posit relationships between texts which are merely in the eye of the beholder, but attempt to establish and follow criteria to assert that the relationships posited were placed there in the alluding texts with intentionality and implications for the historical meanings of the texts. As Hays has pointed out, this sort of study, "compels respect for diachronic concerns."⁹ In order to refer to one text an intentional borrower and another as the source of that borrowing it is simply not possible to ignore the chronological relationships which we are implicitly positing between the selected texts. Study of the dating of various controversial texts is not the primary aim of this investigation and will figure only into the discussions of Psalms from the Psalter as all other Christian hymns examined are clearly authored in the post-Biblical period.

It is significant to note that our investigation of these two types of literature, both of which have been used in Christian worship, diverges to a point. The Psalms are canonical scripture. In addition to their historical and ongoing function as Jewish and Christian expressions of praise; they are recognized as inspired literature and as such carry

⁸ This definition is based upon the definition of allusion given by Benjamin Sommer which is summarized by Schultz as, "as a marked reuse of an earlier text in which the verbal repetition's diachronic dimension and rhetorical or strategic but non-interpretive purpose are discernible," 40.

⁹ Richard B. Hays, Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), xii.

more theological authority than those hymns composed outside of the canonical period. In addition, our study of the Psalms will employ the name Yahweh to refer to God. It is significant to note that this God called Yahweh by Old Testament authors and most fully revealed in Jesus Christ is the same God worshipped in all later Christian hymns examined. However, we will follow Christian tradition in using the more familiar English titles of God and Lord in our examination of Wesleyan hymns both to indicate that we are referring to the entirety of the Trinitarian God as well as to conform to Wesley's own expression.

In addition to defining the terms and presuppositions which underlie this study, it is significant to note the criteria which will be used for determining that an allusive relationship exists between given texts. Allusion will be considered likely when:

- a) There is a marked resemblance between the text under investigation and the proposed source of allusion in lexical and semantic matters. The reuse of no less than two terms whose relationship with one another is shown to be relatively unique will be seen as strong evidence for a relationship between given texts.¹⁰

This criterion will be applied to texts with recognition of the translation of the Old Testament most familiar to the author of the proposed alluding hymn. For Psalms the Masoretic Hebrew text will be considered the authoritative source text. For Wesleyan hymns, the Authorized Version will be used as it was the text most

¹⁰ This criteria is based on that of VanRuiten who writes, "the minimum conditions which a text has to satisfy in order to be considered as having been influenced . . . concern the vocabulary that texts have in common: at least two words of a text must be in common . . . added to this, the words must be *comparatively syntactically connected*, while moreover this combination of two, or more, words must be *unique* in the OT." qtd. in Harm W.M. van Grol, "Exegesis of the Exile - Exegesis of Scripture?: Ezra 9:6-9." in *Intertextuality in Ugarit and Israel*, ed. by Johannes C. De Moor, (Boston: Brill, 1995), 40. Note however, that Grol is correct in critiquing this criterion as being possibly excessively limiting, disallowing thematic connections in favor of lexical ones. We will utilize this criteria in spite of Grol's critique precisely because of the limiting nature of the criteria. They help to weed out those instances in which the subjective elements of this type of study allow us to see allusion where the mind would like to see allusion or where apparent allusion derives from common elements of a similar genre or common idiom.

familiar to and frequently used by Charles Wesley. Additionally, use of these terms and others in similar syntactical patterns will be considered further evidence of their relationship.¹¹

b) The source text can be shown to have likely been available to the author of the alluding text.¹² This criterion will be significant only for the Psalm texts as Charles Wesley clearly had the entirety of the Old and New Testaments at his disposal.

The more plausibly an author can be shown to have been familiar with the source text, the more likely it becomes that the author may have utilized allusion to that source text in his or her writing. Therefore, preferences for a proposed text within the preaching or other writings of a hymnwriter may be considered indications of familiarity with the text and support for assertions of allusions which show plausibility on other grounds.

c) A plausible reason for or interpretation of the allusion may be proposed.¹³

Allusion, being an active endeavor by an author, must have a purpose whether it be to draw on the authority of another author, to import meaning into the text being written, or to correct or amend a previous theological statement. We will consider the argument for intentional allusion strengthened when a plausible reason for the allusion may be proposed based on the meaning which is added to the interpretation of a text through this allusion.

¹¹ Compare with Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), who notes, "identical word order almost certainly results from borrowing," 71.

¹² This is essentially Hays' test of historical plausibility, pages 29-31, where he argues that the text being alluded to must demonstrate a likelihood of being sufficiently prior to the alleged alluding text for the allusion to have actually taken place.

¹³ This follows Hays' criteria of satisfaction, pages 29-31, which can be summarized as requiring that the proposed allusion should fit into or ideally enhance the argument or theme being developed in the alluding work, that the meaning gleaned from the allusion should be one which is a believable one for the author of the alluding text, and that the reading should make sense.

d) A pattern of allusion is discerned.¹⁴ In cases in which an author demonstrates a repeated affinity for alluding to particular texts or genres based on the above criteria, other allusions to the same or similar material may be confirmed.

It may also be necessary at points to assert that the dependence between texts runs in a particular direction. Dating of texts within the canon is always controversial and scholars diverge over many of the texts under investigation in this study. It may be necessary in some cases to determine whether the intentional alluder is the Psalmist or the writer of the Exodus accounts. The arguments for dependence will be based upon the other relationships which exist between the given Psalm and other canonical scriptures. While many authors allude, it is to be considered more likely for a given author to allude to several different texts within the canon than for a whole variety of canonical authors to refer to the same Psalm on different topics. When a text can be demonstrated to possess linkages with a variety of different canonical texts, it seems most likely that that text is the borrower rather than the source of other allusions.

Our argument will be based on the accumulation of evidence Sommer is correct in calling it, “an art, not a science.”¹⁵ We may never be able to know with certainty whether a given author makes an intentional allusion to a Biblical text, but it may be shown to be probable.

STATEMENT OF THESIS

This paper will utilize the intertextual methods outlined above in order to establish that worshippers of God throughout history have drawn on the narratives of the canon to express the particular nature of God which they highlight in worship in light of the events of their own day. While allusions to a number of Old Testament texts could have been examined, this study has limited its scope to examination of those hymn texts which allude

¹⁴ See Hays, 29-31 as well as Sommer, 45.

¹⁵ Sommer, 35.

to the events of the Exodus. This particular narrative has been chosen both for its theological depth and wide usage as well as for its strong appeal and variety of applications among a diverse range of peoples throughout history. Patterns discerned within the varied usage of this narrative in worship will be used to propose that Christian worship in our own day may build upon earlier examples by utilizing the narrative genre to express worship to God in ways which are both true to God's character as revealed in the canonical texts, and relevant to the historical situation of today's worshippers.

Chapter two will focus on the Asaphite Psalm 77. We will see how the Psalmist frames his own understanding of a spiritual crisis through reference to the canonical scriptures and then finds hope within that situation through remembrance of God's mighty actions as revealed through the canonical scriptures. We will see that the texts of the Old Testament are not merely historical records of past events which are to be remembered as incidental occurrences, but in the Psalmist's mind they are revelatory events which indicate the character of God and the ways in which God might be expected and depended upon to behave in the future. Chapter three will continue our exploration of the Asaphite's use of historical narratives in their hymns through examination of Psalm 78. This Psalm will demonstrate an appropriation of a canonical historical event to the current situation in the lives God's worshippers. Lessons learned from the past are applied to a new and powerful call to the people to renew their commitment to God through worship.

Chapter four will examine a Charles Wesley hymn, "When Israel out of Egypt Came," which recounts the Exodus from Egypt in an expansion of Psalm 114. We will examine the ways in which Charles Wesley utilized his theological understandings and the theological issues of his day to expand the short canonical hymn into a theological remembrance and response. Chapter five will examine the Charles Wesley hymn, "Fight the Good Fight of Faith," which reads the Christian experience of salvation and sanctification through the terms and imagery of the historical Exodus from Egypt. This

creative use of language and imagery will be examined and its implications for understanding Charles Wesley's Christology will be discussed.

The final chapter will make application of the previous chapters' findings for Christian worship. Guidelines will be established for the use of Old Testament imagery in Christian worship and suggestions will be made for starting points for this creative endeavor.

Chapter Two

Psalm 77 - Finding God in the Midst of Struggle

For the Leader, According to Jedethun, A Song of Asaph

1 My voice let me lift up to God

2 My voice to God he will hear regarding me.

3 In the day of my distress I inquired of the Lord,

4 at night my hand was stretched out without becoming numb

5 my life refused to be comforted.

6 Let me remember God and let me cry aloud,

7 let me muse and let my mind envelop itself. SELAH

8 You grasp my eyelids

9 I am forced not to speak.

10 I imagine days from antiquity,

11 years of eternity.

12 Let me remember my song in the night, let me muse in my heart.

13 Then my spirit will search itself.

14 Will the Lord reject forever

15 and not turn and be pleased again?

16 Will he fail to remember his hesed

17 and cease to speak to generation after generation?

18 Will the gracious God ignore

19 since in his anger he has shut up his compassion? SELAH

20 Then I said, it is my sickness

21 the right hand of the almighty has changed;.

22 Let me remember the mighty deeds of Yah

23 so that I might remember your ancient wonders.

24 Then I will tell about your deeds,

25 and concerning your severe dealings I will meditate.

26 God, you walk in holiness.

27 What God is as great as God?

28 You are the God of marvelous deeds.

29 You make your strength known among the people.

30 You redeemed your people an outstretched arm,

31 the sons of Jacob and Joseph. SELAH

32 The waters saw you, God, the sea saw you and writhed.

33 Also the deep trembled,

34 the waters poured forth, the clouds gave a pounding voice.

35 Also, your arrows were shooting themselves.

36 The voice of thunder was in the whirlwind and lightning light the streams.

37 The earth quaked and shook.

38 In the sea your path and your trail were not known in the waters,

39 and the ones who would supplant you were not known.

40 You guided your people like a flock,

41 by the hand of Moses and Aaron.¹⁶

¹⁶ The translation of the Psalm is my own.

Even the most casual observer of Psalm 77 will recognize its allusion to the Exodus tradition in its reference to Moses and Aaron (77:20). Yet, in more subtle ways, the Exodus tradition permeates the Psalm and defines both the questions the Psalmist asks and their answers. It is these allusions and the way they allow the Psalmist to appropriate the Exodus narrative for his own day that interest us here.

IDENTIFICATION OF EXODUS ALLUSIONS

Psalm 77 is a mixture of lament and thanksgiving forms. It begins as a lament. The Psalmist finds himself in a distressing situation, and expresses the grief of that situation in vivid imagery involving both vocal expressions of distress and bodily and mental reactions to that distress. The precise nature of that distress is difficult to discern¹⁷ and a variety of proposals have been made regarding the crisis to which the Psalmist is responding ranging from a personal loss to the exile.¹⁸ The questions posed by the Psalmist appear to indicate that the Psalmist or possibly the Psalmist's generation are not guiltless in whatever calamity has come upon them. The imagery of God being displeased and rejecting them paired with mention of God's anger give the impression that the Psalmist is aware of some sin which has led to the distressing situation. More than that can not be discerned with any certainty.

Whatever the cause of the Psalmist's distress, the reaction to that situation voiced in this Psalm boils down to one question -- Where is God in all of this? As Mays points out, these sorts of questions are not unique to our Psalmist and "have often been the liturgy of those on the edge of despair."¹⁹ The Psalmist's lament climaxes with a series of questions which grow out of the Psalmist's reaction to whatever situation has prompted the lament. "Will the Lord reject forever and not return to be pleased again? Will he fail

¹⁷ Artur Weiser, *The Psalms*, trans. Herbert Hartwell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), goes so far as to say that regarding the situation the Psalmist is lamenting, "we are entirely in the dark," 531.

¹⁸ Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150* trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 114.

¹⁹ James L. Mays, *Psalms* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989), 251.

to remember his hesed and cease to speak to generation after generation? Will the gracious God ignore since in his anger he has shut up his compassion?" (Psalm 77:9-10) These questions appear to be posed in direct response to the nature of God which the Psalmist recalls from the Exodus narratives.²⁰ In Exodus 34, Yahweh appears before Moses on Mt. Sinai and proclaims the divine name and gives the clearest description of God's own self understanding of his nature in the entire Hebrew Bible proclaiming, "Yahweh, Yahweh, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in hesed and faithfulness, keeping hesed for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the childrens' children, to the third and the fourth generation." (Ex. 34:6-7) It is this description of Yahweh's nature which the Psalmist appears to be expecting to see in his own situation and when he doesn't it leads to this series of questions. The descriptive words רַחֻם (compassion), רַחֻם (gracious), and רַחֻם (hesed/ lovingkindness) which are applied to Yahweh's character in the Exodus 34 account are treated in precisely reverse order by the Psalmist who questions whether these attributes are still a part of Yahweh's nature in light of the Psalmist's own experience.

The Psalmist begins with רַחֻם (lovingkindness) which the Exodus account describes Yahweh as abounding in. The Psalmist wonders whether Yahweh remembers this aspect of the divine nature at all. It is interesting that this idea of remembering is used in light of the allusion to Exodus. At the outset of the Exodus narratives (Exodus 2:24-25), the text indicates that Yahweh has remembered the covenant with the patriarchs and now intends to act on behalf of Israel. The Psalmist now pairs this idea of Yahweh remembering not with the covenant but with Yahweh's very nature. The Psalmist is appealing to Yahweh on the grounds of Yahweh's own self-description to choose now to

²⁰ John S. Kselman, "Psalm 77 and the Book of Exodus," *The Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University* 11 (n.d.): 53.

intervene in the Psalmist's own situation just as previous intervention of the Exodus was a reaction to remembering.

The Psalmist does not stop there, but moves on to רַחֵם (gracious) which is both here and in the Exodus passage used to modify אֱלֹהִים (God). The Psalmist builds upon the argument that God should remember his hesed by accusing this God who describes Godself as gracious of ignoring, i.e. doing nothing about the Psalmist's situation. This is precisely what the Exodus passage which recalls God remembering the covenant with the patriarchs indicates that God will not do in light of that remembrance. Yet the Psalmist feels that if God remembers the aspect of God's nature which is lovingkindness, then God has somehow found a way to ignore the Psalmist's plight in spite of that nature. The irony is laid thick here by the Psalmist. One who is gracious would not be capable of fully ignoring the needs of a dependent, yet that is precisely what the Psalmist believes God is doing. To the Psalmist God must either not be gracious, which appears to be the thrust of the question, or God will act in response to the Psalmist's pleas.

Finally, the Psalmist requests Yahweh's רַחֲמֵיךָ (compassion) which was the first adjective used by Yahweh to describe the divine nature in the Exodus 34 account. Ironically, the Psalmist blames the apparent lack of compassion on Yahweh's anger which is also described in the Exodus 34:6-7 revelation of Yahweh's nature. However, the statement made in Exodus 34:6 is that Yahweh is slow to anger. This image of a compassionate God who is slow to anger is turned around by the Psalmist who does not feel that he is experiencing a compassionate God and so believes that anger has finally overcome Yahweh's compassionate nature. Again there seems to be a note of challenge in the Psalmist's despairing cries urging God to prove the Psalmist wrong and allow compassion to triumph over anger.

The accusation that God will "cease to speak to generation after generation," is not without its own allusion to the Exodus description of Yahweh's nature either. According to that description Yahweh's רַחֲמֵיךָ (lovingkindness) was to extend from

generation to generation, while in the Psalmist's view Yahweh not only does not express lovingkindness to his generation but does not even speak to them.

Throughout this expression of grief and questioning which arises from the Psalmist, the proper name of God has not been used. **אֲדֹנָי** (Lord) and **אֱלֹהִים** (God) are used but **יְהוָה** (Yahweh) is conspicuously absent. This also may be seen as an intentional aspect of the Psalmist's allusion to the Exodus 34 narrative. The Exodus 34 narrative focuses on **יְהוָה** (Yahweh) as the proper name of God. Moses is told beforehand that God will appear before him and proclaim God's name. Then the revelation of God's nature begins, "Yahweh, Yahweh, a God merciful and gracious." The fact that the name Yahweh is not used at all by the Psalmist is not an indication that the Psalmist is not familiar with this personal name of the God to whom he is speaking, since the Psalmist has given us ample evidence that he is familiar with this particular narrative in detail in which Yahweh's name is revealed. The absence of the divine name appears rather to be a continuation of the Psalmist's commentary on Yahweh's self-description.²¹ The Psalmist does not perceive God acting in the way in which Yahweh is described as acting and therefore the Psalmist calls this God by the more generic terms God and Lord. Additionally, there appears to be a concern on the part of the Psalmist over his own lack of intimacy with the deity. The Psalmist complains that God does not speak to this generation and that God has rejected them. The use of the more generic terms for God rather than the intimate divine name Yahweh may be an expression of these feelings of alienation and separation. The Psalmist is clearly aware of the divine name as he uses it in abbreviated form in verse 23 and we have established that he makes extended reference to the Exodus 34 passage in which that name is revealed. The exclusion, in light of the Psalmist's polemical pleading rooted in this famous revelatory passage regarding the

²¹ For more on the Psalmist's questions as commentary see M.D. Goulder, The Psalms of Asaph and the Pentateuch (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic), 1996.

divine name, is a striking one which seems to make best sense of the evidence as an intentional omission. A stylistic choice or preference for Elohim does not do justice to the clear allusion to the Exodus 34 passage we have documented nor does it make sense of the employment of Yah within the Psalm. Attribution of the Psalm to a theorized “elohistic Psalter,” is a less plausible assertion in light of this evidence since it does not explain the meaning or theological significance of the usage (or non-usage) of the divine name as our assertion does.

We have seen that the language of the Psalmist’s distress grows directly out of and is made more powerful by its intertwining with the description of Yahweh’s nature in Exodus 34:6-7. The Psalmist is not merely distressed over his own troubles or even over the troubles of the nation, but is distressed over what the Psalmist perceives to be the absence of God in those troubles, particularly in light of the nature of Yahweh as the Psalmist understands that nature from the Exodus account. The Psalmist asks, ‘Where is God?’ but more significantly the Psalmist asks, ‘Where is God’s lovingkindness, where is God’s compassion, where is God’s graciousness?’ In essence without using the divine name, the Psalmist asks, ‘Where is Yahweh?’ The common human question of where is God in my distress is given breadth and expression in the Psalmist’s understanding of God through his knowledge of the scriptures. The Psalmist’s honest worship before God is cloaked in God’s own words. His questioning is laden with expectations which Yahweh’s self description has fueled.

The Psalm does not end with the questioning. Mays and others have noted that the questions form a pivot within the Psalm which drive the Psalmist onward in further reflection upon Yahweh.²² The Psalm itself appears to be structured around the setting up of a problem and that problem’s solution. The problem is the Psalmist’s calamity and the search to find Yahweh in its midst. This search has been poignantly expressed in the

²² Mays, 251.

Psalmist's cries that God's nature as revealed in Exodus 34 is strikingly absent from his own experience. However, the Psalm takes a major turn following this series of questions and enters a new phase. This phase presents the Psalmist's solution to feelings of alienation from Yahweh.²³ The Psalmist resolves to meditate upon the nature of God as revealed in the story of the Exodus itself. The Psalmist says, "let me remember the mighty deeds of Yah." This abbreviated form of Yahweh is the closest this alienated Psalmist comes to employing the divine name. Here in the doings of the Lord in the past the Psalmist appears to see a glimpse of the God he longs for, enough so that he hints at the divine name.

The evidence for an allusive relationship between this text and the Exodus account is multifold. The phrase marvelous deeds **עֲשֵׂה פִלְא** which is used by the Psalmist as an attribute of God in verse 16, "You are the God of marvelous deeds" is convincing evidence of an intentional link between these texts.²⁴ The two words **עֲשֵׂה** and **פִלְא** are used in combination only here and in Exodus 15:11 and Psalm 78:12 which, as we will see, also alludes directly to the Exodus narratives. In Exodus 15:11 Yahweh is exalted in the peoples' praises following the deliverance at the Red Sea with the words, "Who is like you, O LORD among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendor, doing wonders **עֲשֵׂה פִלְא**?" In the Exodus account the participle **עֲשֵׂה** is used in a verbal sense stressing Yahweh as the subject of the action, whereas in the Psalmist's use of words it is given a more nounlike connotation, however the words are the same and the intentional allusive relationship is clear. In both cases the attribution to God of doing wonders occurs within the context of an exclamation of the incomparability of God.²⁵

²³ Kselman argues that the "hymnic representation of God's mastery over the sea in Ps. 77:17-20 is employed by the poet to answer," the preceding questions, 53.

²⁴ Brian Douglas Russell, "The Song of the Sea: The Date and Theological Significance of Exodus 15:1-21" (Ph.D. Diss., Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education, 2002), notes that Psalm 77:15 and Exod 15:11 include this "identical phrase," 219.

²⁵ Russell, 219.

This doing of wonders appears to be an aspect of what makes God unique among all other gods in the minds of the worshippers by the sea in Exodus and the Psalmist.

There is a sense in which the Psalmist has joined his voice with those of the worshippers on the shore of the sea in giving praise to God for the glorious triumph over the Egyptians. The Psalmist has questioned God's faithfulness in the time of his own distress in much the same way as the Israelites in Egypt must have wondered about God's covenant with Abraham in the years of their bondage. The Psalmist has found evidence of God's faithfulness, of God's lovingkindness, compassion and graciousness, if not in his own story, in the story of his people and their deliverance at the sea. He has vicariously experienced the deliverance of Yahweh through recollection of the events which have made his own life possible and which proved God's graciousness to an entire nation.

An additional specific textual tie is the use of **גְּאַלְתָּ בְּזְרוּעַ** (you redeemed by an outstretched arm) in Psalm 77:16. This combination of Hebrew roots occurs only here and in Exodus 6:6 in which God instructs Moses to tell the Israelites, "I am Yahweh, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm (**וְנִגְאַלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּזְרוּעַ**)." The Psalmist is echoing that promise of God with the affirmation that the promise was kept, that Yahweh truly did redeem the people with an outstretched arm at the shore of the Red Sea. In the midst of the Psalmist's own apparent distress, he is able to recognize that in this case God was faithful and delivered Israel at the Sea just as was promised to Moses. In the face of the Psalmist's uncertainty regarding God's character because of his own struggles, the evidence of past faithfulness appears to give the Psalmist hope for his own struggles.²⁶

The imagery used to describe the actual events at the Red Sea is striking, particularly in light of its uniqueness in comparison to the traditions we have within the

²⁶ Kraus comments, "In view of the wonders that God has done, the salvific faithfulness of God can no longer be subject to doubt," 116. Also Russell writes, "Psalm 77 gives clues that it is consciously appealing to the past in order to find hope for its present and future," 220.

canon. It is abundantly clear from the references to the sea and to Moses and Aaron that the event being described is that of the Exodus through the Red Sea, however the language and imagery appears to align neither with the Exodus 14 narrative account of that event, nor with the Exodus 15 lyrical recounting of that event.²⁷ This author retells the same story, and is true to the significant issues namely that Yahweh was the active deliverer and that the elements of nature described (sea, whirlwind, wind, water, lightning, and thunder) acted in obedience to God's will. However, the author creatively describes the event with poetic imagery. It is as if this is the Psalmist experiencing for himself the deliverance at the sea through imaginative retelling of the story.²⁸ Interestingly, the Egyptians - major players in the original Exodus - are nowhere to be seen in the Psalmist's retelling of the story.²⁹ They are not there to be feared, to be fled from or even to be conquered. They are simply absent. This may serve as a hint that the Psalmist is contemporizing the deliverance at the sea to his own situation. We do not see the Psalmist's own struggles here either. What fills the view of the Psalm to such an extent that it crowds all other things out is the miraculous deliverance by Yahweh's hand.³⁰ This is what the Psalmist was looking for in his own life in the lament sections of the Psalm and this is what he finds hope in, in the retelling of the stories of the past. As Mays helpfully sums up, "the hymn does what praise and confession are meant to do -- to represent the God of revelation as the reality and subject of truth in the face of all circumstances and contrary experience."³¹

²⁷ Russell notes that this "slightly different account," is framed by allusions to the Exodus 15 account of the event at the sea, 220.

²⁸ Mays refers to this as "thinking the past into the present," and justifies this understanding through his definition of the root זָכַר (remember), 252.

²⁹ Russell, 220.

³⁰ Konrad Schaefer, *Psalms* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), notes that "In the end, the problem is not solved, but rather dissolves in the light of a more profound experience of God," 190.

³¹ Mays, 253.

IMPLICATIONS FOR WORSHIP

What might we be able to propose from this exploration for the use of narratives in worship? First, it appears that honest assessment of our own feelings about God might be more fully expressed through interaction of those feelings with the narratives of God's activity and nature found in the canon. The Psalmist was able to examine his own feelings of abandonment by God through careful examination of the ways in which his own experiences of God interacted with God's own self-description in Exodus 34. The Psalmist discovered that his question really was not so much 'Where is God?' but rather 'Who is God?' The problem was not that God was missing but that God was not behaving in the way that Psalmist expected. This led the Psalmist to cry out in wondering if God had changed. Our own worship would be enriched by an effort to examine our own spiritual struggles in light of the stories of the people of God. We might find like the Psalmist that our questions for God are changed and redefined by such an experience. Second, there is hope in the stories of God's deeds in the past. As Anderson writes, "This is no sentimental journey but a deliberate attempt to renew one's hope and courage by considering God's greatness and majesty, and his special concern for his people in times past."³² The Psalmist looked back to the paradigmatic event of deliverance in the canon he had. He was able to relive the experience of the people at the Red Sea and find hope in the realization that the God who accomplished that deliverance was the same God he worshipped. Like the Psalmist, Christian worship has a great event of deliverance on which to reflect. In times of despair a retelling and reliving of the story of the deliverance accomplished for the people of God by Jesus Christ may grant hope and renewal of relationship with the Almighty for the disheartened worshipper.

³² A. A. Anderson, The Book of Psalms V. 2 Psalms 73-100 (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1972), 556.

Chapter Three

Psalm 78: Learning from the Lessons of the Past

1 A Song of Asaph

Listen my people to my instruction

cause your ears to be attentive to the sayings of my mouth.

2 I will open my mouth in a song, I will gush forth riddles from of old,

3 which we have heard and known and our fathers recounted for us.

4 we will not conceal from our sons or the generation after, the recounting of the praise of Yahweh and the strength of the marvelous deeds which he did.

5 He raised up knowledge in Jacob and teaching he put in Israel which he commanded our fathers to cause their sons to know.

6 That the next generation might know them, even children that will be born, will arise and recount to their sons.

7 and put confidence in God and do not forget the mighty deeds of God and keep his commandments.

8 but do not be as your fathers' stubborn and rebellious generation, who did not prepare their hearts and were not faithful to the spirit of God.

9 The sons of Ephriam were handlers of the shooting bow, they turned in the day of summons.

10 They did not obey the covenant of God and in his teaching they refused to walk.

11 They forgot his mighty dealings and his marvelous deeds which they had seen.

12 Their fathers made known these wonders in the land of Egypt in the fields of Zoan.

13 He cleaved the sea and he caused them to pass over and he caused the waters to stand as a heap.

14 He lead in a cloud by day and all the night in a light of fire.

15 He broke a rock in the wilderness and caused irrigation as a deep abundance.

16 He caused the gushing from the rock and the pouring down of a river of water.

17 But they increased their turning to sin rebelling the high on in the dryness.

18 They tested God in their hearts to demand food for their appetite.

19 And they spoke against God. They said is God able to set at table in the wilderness.

20 He struck a rock and water gushed forth and rivers flooded again to them and he was able to give meat to his people when all was ready.

21 Therefore when Yahweh heard and he will caused himself be alienated but the fire is already kindled against Jacob and also anger has gone up upon Israel.

22 For they were not faithful to God and they did not trust in his deliverance.

23 He commanded clouds from above and the doors of the heavens were opened.

24 And he caused to rain upon them manna for eating and bread of heaven he gave to them.

25 The bread of the strong ones men ate, he sent food to them to be satisfied.

26 He caused them to journey east towards the sunrise and he lead them by a strong right hand.

27 He caused to rain upon them meat as dust and birds as numerous as the sands of the sea.

28 He caused to fall in the midst of the camp of their dwelling.

29 and they ate and they were exceedingly satisfied and what they desired he brought to them

30 They were not strangers to their desires and again their hunger was in their mouth.

31 but the anger of God was upon them and he slaughtered them in their fatness but the youth of Israel he caused to kneel.

32 In all this they sinned yet again and they were not faithful to his wonders.

33 And he ended the vanity of their days and their years in terror.

34 After he destroyed them, they sought him and they returned and they sought earnestly for God.

35 and they remembered that God was their rock and God most high was their redeemer.

36 And they persuaded him by their mouths and by their tongues they lied to him.

37 but their hearts were not established as his people and they were not faithful to his covenant.

38 But he was compassionate and he made reconciliation for guilt and did not cause them to be destroyed and he caused much of his anger to return and did not incite all his displeasure.

39 and he remembered that they are flesh, a wind that goes and does not return.

40 Why did they rebel in the wilderness and grieve him in the desert.

41 They returned and they tested God and they wounded the holy one of Israel.
 42 They did not remember his hand in the day which he rescued them from distress.
 43 which he put in Egypt his signs and his wonders in the fields of Zoan.
 44 and He turned their Nile to blood and the flowing water they were not able to drink.
 45 He sent out a swarm against them and they devoured them and frogs which destroyed them.
 46 He gave their produce to locusts and their grain to locusts.
 47 He destroyed their vines by hail and their sycamores by hail.
 48 He killed by hail their beasts and their cattle by firebolts.
 49 He sent out against them the heat of his nostril passing over and anger and distress were being sent out by messengers of evil.
 50 He weighed the path of his anger. He did not withhold from death their living selves, he ceased their lives with pestilence.
 51 He smote all the firstborn in Egypt first of their strength in the tents of Ham
 52 He caused his people to set out as a flock and he lead them as a herd in the wilderness.
 53 He lead them to safety and they did not fear but their enemies were covered by the sea.
 54 And he brought them to the border of this holy mountain which his right hand acquired.
 55 And he drove out the people from before them and he cast down for them a bound inheritance and he caused the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tents.
 56 They tested and they rebelled against God most high and they turned and did not obey.
 57 And they turned back and they acted treacherously as their fathers they were turned as the bow of a traitor.
 58 They caused him to be grieved by their high places and by their idols they caused him to be jealous.
 59 God heard and he caused himself to be alienated and he utterly rejected Israel.
 60 And he abandoned his dwelling at Shiloh, the tent of his dwelling among humans.
 61 He gave the strong ones to captivity and his glory into the hand of the enemy.
 62 He surrounded his people with the sword and he caused himself to abandon his inheritance.
 63 His young men were devoured in fire and his virgins had no glory.
 64 His priests fell by the sword and his widows did not weep.
 65 The Lord awoke as from sleeping, like a mighty man overcome by wine.
 66 He caused his distress to smite after he gave to them eternal reproach.
 67 He despised the tent of Joseph and the tribe of Ephriam he did not choose.
 68 He chose the tribe of Judah and the mountain of Zion which he loves.
 69 And he made it as high from his holiness as the earth's foundations are eternal.
 70 He chose David his servant and he took him from tending sheep.
 71 After feeding sheep he caused him to enter to pasture Jacob his people and Israel his inheritance.
 72 He tended them with a perfect heart and he guided them with an understanding hand.³³

THEME AND HISTORICAL SETTING

The author of Psalm 78 might be described as a Psalmist with a mission. There is a clear intentionality about this Psalm and its message. This Psalm has been variously referred to as a Psalm of recital,³⁴ a wisdom Psalm,³⁵ and a didactic Psalm.³⁶ Despite the variety of labels, the essential thrust of these designations is fairly unified. Scholars seem

³³ The translation of this Psalm is my own.

³⁴ Brueggemann, *Abiding Astonishment*, 24.

³⁵ Weiser, 539.

³⁶ Kraus, 122.

relatively agreed in their opinion that the Psalm is intended to teach the hearers by reference to the events of the past. The most obvious evidence for this interpretation can be found in the Psalm's opening lines in which the Psalmist exhorts the people to listen carefully to the instruction being given with the expressed purpose being so that the hearer might, "put confidence in God and do not forget the mighty deeds of God and keep his commandments." (vs. 7) and also, "not be as your fathers' stubborn and rebellious generation, who did not prepare their hearts and were not faithful to the spirit of God." (vs. 8). The Psalmist's mention of "riddles of old" (vs. 3) also hints at the Psalmist's interest in the past. The strong moralistic and pedagogical tone continues throughout the Psalm and is particularly evident in the Psalmist's assessment of previous generations' responses to God's mighty actions. A good assessment of the overarching message of the Psalm is given by Schaefer, "fidelity to God brings blessings, sinfulness invites punishment, but God's mercy prevails and affords a new beginning."³⁷ This is the lesson the Psalmist appears to invite the reader to learn from the recounting of Yahweh's mighty deeds and the peoples' less than exemplary responses to them.

Debate about the date of authorship and original audience of this Psalm has been widespread and ongoing. Dates have been proposed for this Psalm ranging from the united monarchy³⁸ to the post-exilic period.³⁹ Philip Stern argues compellingly that the most plausible date for this Psalm's composition and original recitation is the reign of Hezekiah and the reforms of the Israelite cultus instituted during his reign. His study is based upon both linguistic analysis of the poetic forms used, apparent use of eighth century terminology familiar from Isaiah and other more clearly datable sources, and the historical events mentioned as well as those ignored.⁴⁰ Clifford adds, "although the

³⁷ Schaefer, 191.

³⁸ Eissfeldt and Albright according to Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 134.

³⁹ Kraus, 124.

⁴⁰ Phillip Stern, "The Eighth Century Dating of Psalm 78 Re-argued," *Hebrew Union College Annual*

Hezekian reform is literarily less well attested than the Josianic, it is in fact a more likely situation for Psalm 78.”⁴¹ Clifford cites the destruction of Samaria in this time period, the instability of the Northern Kingdom leading up to its fall and the resulting authority of the Davidic monarch during this period in support of his thesis.⁴² Perhaps the strongest argument for dating the Psalm is the conclusion of the Psalm itself. The Psalm ends with the rejection of the northern kingdom and the election of the Davidic line, but appears not to know the destruction of Jerusalem. Certainly knowledge of such an event would shift the Psalmist’s interpretation of the lessons of history.⁴³

Placing the Psalm within the historical situation of the recent fall of the northern kingdom and the Hezekian reforms in the south gives us some context within which to interpret the author’s aims and interests in teaching the lessons of history to the hearers. Hezekiah came to rule at a time of great unrest in the history of Israel and Judah. The Assyrian Empire was at its apparent height and had proceeded through the middle east conquering and destroying small nations along the way. The ferocity of the Assyrian threat and its nearness are implicit in the various texts which record this portion of Israelite history. The Assyrians destroyed the northern kingdom, an event alluded to in our Psalm, and during Hezekiah’s time stood at the gates of the city taunting the citizens with the threat of the coming siege and the promise of sanctuary for those who surrendered. (2 Kings 18:28-35.) Hezekiah is famous in the Biblical record for two major events. He is remembered for his defiance of the Assyrian threat and for his restoration of Yahwistic temple worship. The military event for which he is remembered is recorded in 2 Kings 18:13-19:37, 2 Chronicles 32:1- 23, and Isaiah 36-39. In the face of the Assyrian

66.01, 57-64. See also Archie C.C. Lee, “The Context and Function of the Plagues Tradition in Psalm 78” *ISOT* 48 1990, 86 and Russell, 244 in support of a Hezekian date.

⁴¹ Richard J. Clifford, “In Zion and David a New Beginning: An Interpretation of Psalm 78,” in *Traditions in Transformation*, ed. Baruch Halpern and Jon D. Levenson (Winona Lake, IN; Eisenbrauns, 1981), 138.

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ See Stern, Lee and Russell in support of this assertion.

army, Hezekiah prays to the Lord for deliverance at the prompting of Isaiah and the “angel of the LORD,”⁴⁴ slaughters much of the enemy army and the rest flees. Hezekiah is held up as an exemplary leader in a time of crisis. The second major undertaking for which Hezekiah is remembered is the cleansing of the temple and the reinstatement of Passover (2 Chronicles 29:3-30:27). He invites those from the north, particularly the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, who “escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria,” (2 Chronicles 29:6) to celebrate the Passover with the people of Judah. His invitation includes an exhortation to not be like their ancestors who were unfaithful (2 Chronicles 29:7).

This historical backdrop of a culture reeling from the loss of the northern kingdom to Assyria and led by a king dedicated to Yahwistic reform and reinstatement of the Passover celebration provides a potential motive for the composition of the Psalm. The Psalm echoes the invitation to the remnant of the northern kingdom to join in the celebration of the Passover. In 2 Chronicles 30:7 the invitation goes out to the northern kingdom to join in the Passover celebration with these words, וְאַל־תִּהְיוּ כַּאֲבוֹתֵיכֶם (do not be like your fathers). The Psalmist’s exhortation to the people to be not like their fathers is worded, וְלֹא יִהְיוּ כַּאֲבוֹתָם (and do not be like your fathers). The word order is identical as is the combination of verbal roots used. The imperative construction is divergent but carries the same intent. In the context of the asserted Hezekian date for Psalm 78 and the linguistic similarity between these two texts, it seems reasonable to suppose that the Psalmist is alluding directly to Hezekiah’s invitation to the northern tribes. The shared emphasis on not being like their fathers in their faithlessness seems key to this linkage. Likewise the Psalms’ emphasis on the rejection of Samaria and Yahweh’s election of the Davidic monarch seems to urge compliance with that monarch’s requests, in this case Hezekiah’s invitation to covenant obedience through Passover. It seems possible that this Psalm was composed in part as an expression of the invitation and even a

⁴⁴ 2 Kings 19:35 NRSV

strong urging to accept the invitation to the northern remnant to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem.

IDENTIFICATION OF EXODUS ALLUSIONS

Psalm 78 could serve as a textbook for documenting inner-Biblical allusions. The variety and sheer number of sources utilized by this author demonstrate a profound sense of connectedness with the history of the people of God.⁴⁵ In light of the aims of our investigation, we will concern ourselves only with those allusions which are connected with the Exodus tradition.

Various pieces of linguistic evidence may be presented in support of the assertion that Psalm 78 references the Exodus narratives at a number of points. As we noted in our study of Psalm 77, a unique turn of phrase is shared by Psalms 77, 78 and Exodus 15:11. This phrase **עָשָׂה פְּלִא** (doing wonders) appears to refer specifically to God's mighty acts in the Exodus events. A second rare combination of terms in the Old Testament links this Psalm to the Song of the Sea, a poetic recital of God's deeds which climaxes the Exodus narrative. Psalm 78:13b reads **וַיַּצְבּוּ מַיִם כְּמוֹ-גֵד** (he caused the waters to stand up like a heap), while Exodus 15:8b reads **מַיִם נִצְבּוּ כְמוֹ-גֵד** (waters stood up like a heap). Russell calls the Psalmist's phrasing at this point a "virtual quotation of Exod 15:8b."⁴⁶ This verse, however, does more than simply mirror the poetic celebration of the events at the sea in Exodus. It also references the narrative account. Psalm 78:13 divides into parallel bicola. The first line of the verse **וַיַּעַבְדוּ יָם וְיַבְיָעָה** (he cleaved the sea and he caused them to pass over) appears drawn from the narrative portions of the Exodus account. The verb, **יַעַבְדוּ** echoes the usage in Exodus 14:21 which describes the waters being divided and the people's passage through the midst of the waters. Thus, the

⁴⁵ Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), asserts an allusive relationship between this Psalm and the manna and quail tradition in the book of Numbers, 327; and reference is made to the abandonment of Shiloh (Jer. 7:12-14) and to the high places which are referenced numerous times throughout the Old Testament.

⁴⁶ Russell, 222.

Psalmist's wording appears to draw upon both the narrative and poetic descriptions of the events at the sea.

The Psalmist makes reference to the cloud which lead the Israelites by day and the pillar of fire at night. The terminology, **בְּעֶנָן** (by a cloud) and **וְכָל-הַלַּיְלָה** (all the night) both found in Exodus 14:20, while common, seem to clearly echo the Exodus narrative in light of their combination in close proximity and the clear surrounding context within the Psalm of Exodus imagery. While some have proposed that Psalm 78 served as the source text for the Exodus 14 tradition, it seems most probable to consider Psalm 78 the dependent rather than source text in this relationship. In light of the extensive and varied sources utilized within the Psalm⁴⁷ and the well supported Hezekian date, it seems significantly more likely to posit that the Psalmist, who has already distinguished himself as an avid borrower of texts would know and utilize these varied texts rather than that all the authors of the other texts would independently choose to cite this Psalm.

A few other links with the Exodus narratives appear plausible in light of the foregoing documented allusions within the Psalm. Since the Psalmist has demonstrated familiarity with the Exodus traditions, words and phrases which do not meet strict requirements for allusion, may be considered as probable other indications of contact between this Psalm and the Exodus narratives. Psalm 78:43 references Yahweh's **בְּמִצְרַיִם אֱתוֹתָיו** (signs in Egypt). The word for signs is used repeatedly in the Exodus narratives to refer to the miracles Moses and Aaron are commanded to perform before Pharaoh.⁴⁸ A word used for plague in the Exodus account **דָּבָר**⁴⁹ is utilized by the author of the Psalm to describe the killing of the firstborn of Egypt.

⁴⁷ See footnote 40.

⁴⁸ Exodus 4:8, 4:9, 4:17, 4:28, 4:30, 7:3, 8:19, 10:1, 10:2.

⁴⁹ Exodus 9:15, the word in that context refers to the plague of disease on the cattle of Egypt.

ALLUSION IN CONTEXT

As has been pointed out by numerous commentators, Psalm 78 presents a catalogue of God's mighty acts in Israel's history with a specific and explicitly mentioned aim -- to prevent the current generation from angering God by their disobedience as past generations have done.⁵⁰ While no firm linguistic evidence can be presented to illustrate this idea's dependence on an earlier source, these aims and their expression seem vaguely reminiscent of the passages within the Passover institution narrative which lay down guidelines for passing the traditions on to the coming generations. These texts, found in Exodus 12:26-27, 13:8-9 and 13:14-16 iterate that the Passover traditions must be explained to the children and that the reason to be given for the parents' obedience to the rituals of the Passover is to be the story of God's miraculous deliverance of the people from Egypt and the sparing of their firstborn. Repeatedly the people are instructed that these acts of remembrance are to serve "as a sign on your hand and as a reminder on your forehead."⁵¹ The implication appears to be that the Israelites are expected to continue in grateful covenant obedience in light of their continued remembrance from generation to generation of the mighty acts of Yahweh. The Psalms' affinity with the Passover traditions in this regard is enlightening in light of the proposed date and situation of the Psalms' composition. If the Psalm is an invitation to the Passover celebration in Jerusalem, then the allusion to the Passover narrative is both appropriate and compelling. The people have been both indicted and punished for their lack of covenant faithfulness which included neglecting the Passover and passing its traditions along. The call goes out to be different from previous generations, to recount the deeds of Yahweh to your children, presumably as proscribed during the Passover feast. Clifford asserts that, "the

⁵⁰ See Kraus, who refers to this poem's form as didactic, 122; and Weiser, who argues that the Psalm is to preserve the past actions of Yahweh as a "living force," to prevent later unfaithfulness, 538.

⁵¹ Exodus 13:9 and 13:16 NRSV.

Psalm is thus a liturgical expression of the ideal of a united Israel worshipping at a single shrine.”⁵²

Another point of contact between this Psalm and the Exodus narratives appears to be informed and shaped by the Psalm’s potential setting within the Hezekian period. The Psalmist’s recounting of the plagues appear directly inspired by the Exodus account. The Psalmist’s description of the plagues in verse 44 begins, “he turned their Nile to blood and the flowing water they were not able to drink,” mirroring the first plague described in the Exodus narrative. The final plague described also closely mirrors the Exodus account recounting the death of the firstborn again with clear reference to the Egyptians calling them Ham. This final plague matches both in description and in nature to the final plague described in the Exodus accounts. The central portion of the plague description in the Psalm diverges considerably, however, from the Exodus account, including different elements and orderings than that of the Exodus plagues. Swarms and frogs are both included in the Psalmist’s list, but the swarms are listed second rather than following the frogs as the flies do in the Exodus account. Additionally, the word swarm is not used of the flies in the Exodus account, rather this word עָרֹב is associated with the locusts in the Exodus tradition. An additional word for locusts חֲסִיל not known in the Exodus tradition accompanies the Psalmist’s description of the plague of אַרְבֵּה the locusts of the Exodus. The term used for the slaying of vines and sycamores יִהָרֵג is used in the Exodus narrative only of the killing of human beings rather than of plants. The Psalmist’s concern for the vines and sycamores seems particularly unusual since neither of these are mentioned in the Exodus account of the plagues, rather the concern there is with the grain crops. While it seems possible to posit that the Psalmist was working with a different account of the plagues on Egypt which was then blended with the canonical account in much the same way as we have posited earlier in the matter of descriptions of the sea

⁵² Clifford, 141.

crossing in this Psalm; another interesting proposal for this divergent plagues account has been made. Lee has found significant textual contacts between the Psalmist's plagues description and other 8th century descriptions of the Assyrian threat particularly the "messenger of destruction" found both in the Psalmist's description of the slaying of the firstborn and Isaiah's description of the deliverance of Hezekiah from the Assyrian threat in Isaiah 37:36.⁵³ His assertion that the plagues account reflects the current historical context of the Psalm rather than a divergent source of the plagues narrative has much to recommend it. It may help to account for the presence of references to the destruction of flora not present in the Exodus plagues account. The mention of sycamores is rare in the Hebrew Bible. Four occurrences are included in the Kings and Chronicles accounts of the reigns of David and Solomon. The other three occurrences are from the eighth century. Aside from our Psalm, sycamores are mentioned in Amos' famous self description in Amos 7:14 and in Isaiah 9:9. The Isaiah passage is of interest to our theory. Isaiah writes concerning the northern kingdom, presumably soon after its fall, "The Lord sent a word against Jacob, and it fell on Israel; and all the people knew it-- Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria-- but in pride and arrogance of heart they said: "The bricks have fallen, but we will build with dressed stones; the sycamores have been cut down, but we will put cedars in their place."⁵⁴ It seems possible in light of our knowledge that the destruction of sycamores occurred in the siege of Samaria and that this detail was apparently known in Jerusalem during the reign of Hezekiah, that the mention of sycamore destruction in the Psalmist's plagues account is intentionally designed to link the plagues on Egypt with the siege of Samaria in an effort to convince the reluctant northern remnant to participate in the renewal of covenant faithfulness involved in the Hezekian Passover. Lee notes that the Psalmist, "is creative in his treatment of the story, and he is free to

⁵³ Lee, 84.

⁵⁴ Isaiah 9:8-10 NRSV.

relate his congregation's experience to it, reading into it the more recent historical happenings."⁵⁵ The slaying of the firstborn, the climactic plague which concludes both the Exodus and Psalm accounts of the plagues, is presented by Lee as an adaptation of the final climactic plague to the deliverance of Hezekiah from the Assyrian threat. In light of our previous interpretation of the sycamores and our belief that the Psalm may serve pro-Hezekiah propaganda interests, this appears probable. Lee presents evidence of linguistic ties between the description within the Psalm and Isaiah's account of Hezekiah's deliverance.⁵⁶ He comments, "at a time when Israel was under the oppression of the Assyrians, it is natural to find some allusion to Yahweh's punishment of the Assyrians on behalf of his people in order to save the latter from the hand of the former. Just as the destruction of the Egyptian firstborn was the climax of the Exodus, the slaying of the Assyrians forms an automatic expansion of the tenth plague of Exodus."⁵⁷ There is a sense in which the plagues in this Psalm both recall the destruction of the Assyrian siege - their rivers were turned to blood, the sycamores were destroyed - and present hope for its survivors in the person of Hezekiah. While the northern kingdom fell in the bloody plagues described, Hezekiah and the southern kingdom were delivered as alluded to in the description of the final plague. The people are said to be led to Yahweh's sacred mountain, inescapably tied to Jerusalem and Zion in this underlying context. The remnant are implicitly urged to follow the example of the Israelites and follow Yahweh to his holy hill -- Zion. This call to worship aims at restoring covenant faithfulness through return to worship at a central national shrine and through the covenant renewal ceremony of the Passover. Grace is extended to the Northern kingdom in this invitation to join all of Israel at Yahweh's mountain demonstrating that regardless of the people's sin and in line with Yahweh's gracious and forgiving character as revealed in the Psalms' historical recital; the

⁵⁵ Lee, 85.

⁵⁶ Lee, 85.

⁵⁷ Lee, 86.

northern Israelites have not been eternally rejected but called to worship together as part of the whole people of God.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

In light of this context of Hezekian reform and the Assyrian threat, it is possible to see how the contemporizing of the historical deeds of Yahweh present a powerful call to worship. The Exodus event and the details surrounding it are not seen as obscure dusty details of Yahweh's deeds in the past but are presented in the terms and language of the present. The readers are to understand themselves as having lived the Exodus in their own experience and are invited to recommit themselves to Yahweh through worship at the Passover celebration which commemorates both the original deliverance of Yahweh and the more recent deliverance they have experienced. As we observed in Psalm 77, the Psalmist does not appear contented with the people recalling the deeds of Yahweh in the past, but seems intent on their reliving and responding in light of those events in their own time. The events of history are not seen as static completed realities but as realities which inform and reform current experience. In this sense they appear almost sacramental, mediating the grace and deliverance of God to current situations.

Chapter Four
When Israel Out of Egypt Came: God's Power Revealed Through History

*When Israel out of Egypt came,
 And left the proud oppressor's land,
 Supported by the great I AM,
 Safe in the hollow of his hand,
 The Lord in Israel reigned alone,
 And Judah was his fav'rite throne.*

*The sea beheld his power, and fled,
 Disparted by the wondrous rod;
 Jordan ran backward to his head,
 And Sinai felt th'incumbent God;
 The mountains skipped like frightened rams,
 The hills leaped after them as lambs.*

*What ailed thee, O thou trembling sea,
 What horror turned the river back?
 Was nature's God displeased with thee?
 And why should hills or mountains shake?
 Ye mountains huge, that skipped like rams,
 Ye hills, that leaped as frightened lambs!*

*Earth, tremble on, with all thy sons,
 In presence of thy awful Lord!
 Whose power inverted nature owns,
 Her only law his sovereign word:
 He shakes the centre with his rod,
 And heaven bows down to Jacob's God.*

*Creation varied by his hand
 Th'omnipotent Jehovah knows!
 The sea is turned to solid land,
 The rock into a fountain flows,
 And all things as they change proclaim
 The Lord eternally the same.⁵⁸*

This hymn of Charles Wesley appears to use the events of the Exodus to portray the majesty and grandeur of God to his own generation. There is a sense in which the singer is expected to find comfort in the changing situations of her life in the knowledge that God is mighty enough to drastically change the order of the world and the rules by which it operates.

⁵⁸ Hymn 214 in The Works of John Wesley: A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists vol. 7. ed. Franz Hildebrandt and Oliver A Beckerlegge (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 348-9.

IDENTIFICATION OF EXODUS ALLUSIONS

It is fairly obvious to the reader from the initial lines of the song that Wesley has the events of the Exodus as recorded in the Old Testament in mind as he composes this hymn. What is not as obvious is that Wesley is looking at the events of the Exodus through the eyes of the Psalmist. The hymn appears to be a fairly intentional expansion of Psalm 114 by Wesley. John and Charles jointly published four collections of Psalms and Hymns between 1737 and 1743. Quite a number of the hymns were the work of Isaac Watts, the master of Psalm paraphrasing. "When Israel out of Egypt Came" was first published in the final 1743 collection. Two hymn texts on this Psalm had been previously published, one by Charles and one by Watts, but this third text displaced them both. There is some evidence of Watt's influence in this text, but Charles also very clearly follows his own poetic directions. It utilizes many of the words of the Psalm as well as its structure. The hymn is composed in a parallelistic format echoing this aspect of Hebrew poetry which characterizes the Psalm text. Additionally, Wesley takes the quotations from the Psalm in order, leaving the Psalmist's introduction, and recapitulation intact.⁵⁹ The hymn is thus a mingling of Wesley's words and the words of the Psalmist which are at times adjusted to fit Wesley's intentions.

THE PSALMIST'S WORDS

Let us first consider the lines Wesley takes from the Psalmist which appear to form the frame upon which this hymn is hung.⁶⁰ The opening line, "When Israel out of Egypt came," is an almost verbatim echoing of the Psalm 114:1 in the AV, "When Israel came out of Egypt." Wesley omits the parallel phrase which accompanies this statement in the

⁵⁹ This Psalm analyzed structurally exhibits a repetition of the idea that the mountains leaped and the hills skipped. The first time this is a statement and the second a question. Wesley retains both verses nearly verbatim in their entirety, thus preserving the Psalmist's structure of statement and reiteration in the form of a question.

⁶⁰ See the chart at the conclusion to this chapter which illustrates the interchange between the Psalmist's words and Wesley's additions.

Psalm text, “the house of Jacob from a people of strange language,” and replaces it with a parallelism of his own, “And left the proud oppressor’s land.” The adjustment made by Wesley certainly fits within the Biblical picture of the Exodus and emphasizes more clearly perhaps the nature of Israel’s stay in Egypt. The sojourn in Egypt is not merely a stay in a strange place, but represents bondage and oppression. Wesley’s adjustment emphasizes the fact that this is a redemption, a rescue from slavery, not merely a change of location.

The second quotation of Psalm 114 occurs in the conclusion to the first stanza, “The Lord in Israel reigned alone, and Judah was his favorite throne.” Significant adjustments have been made by Wesley to the text he employs here from the Psalm 114:2 in the AV, “Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion.” While it could be argued that much of the adjustment made by Wesley to this verse is done to fit his rhyme scheme and to make the verse fit English poetic requirements, there appears to be more at work here. Wesley has switched the order of the parallelism putting Israel first and then Judah. The statement that, “the Lord in Israel reigned alone,” appears to say a good bit more than the simple statement that, “Israel was his dominion.” First, there is the issue of singularity in rulership. While this idea would be implied in the concept of dominion, Wesley’s explicit mention of this singularity lends it significance in the eye of the reader and in the meaning of the poem. Additionally, there appears to be an intentional echoing of the Song of Moses and the Israelites in Exodus 15 in Wesley’s choice of words. Exodus 15:18 reads, “The Lord shall reign forever and ever,” in the Authorized Version. In light of Wesley’s apparent familiarity with this text and the similar contexts of the poem and the Song of Moses and the Israelites, it seems likely that this is an intentional allusion to this text on Wesley’s part. Fretheim has pointed out that the theme of the Lord reigning is a significant one in Exodus in which the Lord’s rightful reign as proclaimed in the song of the sea is contrasted throughout the beginning of the book with Pharaoh who is called the

king but rules over the people unjustly.⁶¹ As such, the proclamation in the midst of the people's celebration of the victory at the sea is both a statement of God's triumph over the usurper who dominated them in the early portions of the book and a pledge to serve the Lord as will be spelled out in the remainder of the book. The parallel phrase which follows, "And Judah was his favorite throne," might be adjusted from, "Judah was his sanctuary," primarily to fit the rhythm and rhyme scheme with which Wesley is working, but it is significant to note that Judah would have a different significance for Wesley than it would have had for the Psalmist. It seems likely to posit that the Psalmist is writing in the period of the divided monarchy.⁶² There is a distinction made between Israel and Judah which implies that they are viewed at least somewhat as separate entities. Additionally, Judah is designated by the Psalmist as the sanctuary. The most probable intention of this phrase is that it refers to the location of the temple as the sanctuary of God, which is distinguished from God's relationship to Israel where the temple was not located.

Wesley's version of the verse is even more favorable to Judah than is the Psalmist's. It is likely that for Wesley as an 18th century Christian writer, the name Judah had different implications than simply a nation or the location of the temple or even the Davidic monarchy. Wesley would have been aware that Jesus was from the tribe of Judah and this may have entered into this treatment of this mention of Judah by the writer. Certainly the designation, "fav'rite" is strange without some sort of motivation, and in light of Wesley's penchant for seeing the New Testament in the Old,⁶³ it seems plausible that this deference to the tribe of Judah is made in light of the Christ's association with it.

⁶¹ Fretheim, 17.

⁶² According to Anderson, 783; Weiser places this Psalm before the fall of the Northern Kingdom.

⁶³ John R. Tyson, ed. *Charles Wesley: A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), writes, "[Charles'] hermeneutic was characterized by a persistent christological focus . . . it utilized typology and allegory (along with other devices) to set the gospel message of faith and comfort in the life experiences of the singer or reader," 443.

The third quotation of Psalm 114 begins the second stanza. The first and third lines of this stanza read, "The sea beheld his power, and fled, . . . Jordan ran backward to his head." These lines have been divided from one another and each has been provided a parallel by Wesley. The verse being cited, Psalm 114:3 reads, "The sea saw it and fled: Jordan was driven back." The initial change made by Wesley to this verse is to clarify the "it" in the Psalmist's writing. Whether or not this was the Psalmist's intention, Wesley makes the power of God the thing seen by the sea. He further clarifies that he is referring to the power of God displayed in the Exodus event by supplying the parallel line, "Disparted by the wondrous rod."

The adjustments made to the statements about the Jordan are poetic in nature. Not only do the adjustments allow the phrase to rhyme, they allow Wesley to paint a more vivid picture of God's power over the river than the simple statement that it was driven back. In Wesley's version the intent is clearly not to portray historical detail but to emphasize the power of God in fully reversing the flow of the river all the way to its source. An imagery is created in this change of words which impresses upon the reader the sheer might of God's power.

Wesley continues his dependence upon Psalm 114 in the conclusion to the second stanza which reads, "The mountains skipped like frightened rams, The hills leaped after them as lambs." There is very little adjustment made to the quoted Psalm 114:4 text, "The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs." The most noticeable adjustment made by Wesley is the addition of an explicit reference to fear. The mountains are compared to frightened rams rather than just to the movement of rams. This follows Wesley's interest in portraying God's majesty and power. While this idea was probably latent in the wording of the Psalm, and may even have been obvious to a reader in the text's original context, Wesley makes the connotation of fear explicit in his rewording of the text. Again, it is easy to find justification for this addition in the traditions surrounding the events being described. Wesley could easily have found the ideas of fear and terror in

Exodus, particularly in the Song of Moses and the Israelites where the residents of Canaan are described as being afraid (Exodus 15:14-16).

Wesley models the flow of his hymn on the Psalmist, mirroring the Psalmists questions in verses five and six with a stanza of questions framed with quotations of the Psalmist's questions. The third stanza opens, "What ailed thee, O thou trembling sea, What horror turned the river back," echoing Psalm 114:5 which reads, "What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that thou was driven back?" Again Wesley's additions focus on the fear and terror motif which he appears to be weaving into his hymn. He then ends his stanza with a recapitulation of the previous imagery of mountains and hills hopping about like herd animals by quoting the Psalmist's repetition of this motif in verse 6. Again the additions to the Psalmist's wording focus upon the fear and terror motif by the addition of "frightened" to modify rams.

From here Wesley's dependence on the Psalmist grows much looser. The final two stanzas each contain only one quotation of the Psalmist and each is modified much more drastically by Wesley. The fourth stanza begins, "Earth, tremble on, with all thy sons, In presence of thy awful Lord!" citing the Psalmist's verse 7 which reads, "Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob." Wesley's stanza ends with a mention of "Jacob's God" which might be the completion of the quotation of verse 7. The Psalmist's call to fear is to the earth. Wesley expands this command to human beings who are added to the Psalmist's wording by the phrase "with all thy sons." There is a universal sense to Wesley's theology here. He expects not only that the earth should reverence the Lord, but that the creatures upon it will as well. While the Psalmist particularizes the presence of God by telling us which God is meant, i.e. the God of Jacob; Wesley instead modifies God with the adjective "awful." This follows his previously recognized theme of making explicit the fear and terror implicit in the both the Psalmist's text and in the events of the Exodus being portrayed. Wesley is not content with us picturing a mild God in this imagery. He wants us to recognize that Jacob's God

is in fact the God who slew the Egyptians and inspired fear in the inhabitants of Canaan. This shift makes explicit the picture of God that Wesley is attempting to paint, but he retains the Psalmist's specification that this is the God of Jacob - the God of Israel's ancestors - in concluding the stanza with this title.

The final stanza is almost entirely Wesley's alone. He makes a nod in the direction of the final line of the Psalm he has been following when in the fourth line he writes, "The rock into a fountain flows." This line appears to be based somewhat loosely upon Psalm 114:8 which reads, "Which turned the rock into a standing water, the flint into a fountain of waters." If it were not for the vast multitude of quotations from this same Psalm within this hymn it would certainly be stretching credibility to assert that this line alluded to verse eight. However, in light of Wesley's obvious pattern of following sequentially through this Psalm throughout the length of this hymn, and the thematic and verbal links; we can safely assert that Wesley has in mind to include the Psalmist's conclusion into the conclusion of his hymn. However, this act of God which receives significantly more attention in the Psalmist's account as it is the description of the God of Jacob by what he does and includes two parallel lines devoted to the event. Wesley makes its subordinate to the sea crossing and it receives little mention within the hymn.

It seems that Wesley utilizes the Psalmist's imagery and format to a point, but modifies the Psalm as needed to fulfill his aims in hymn writing. The Psalm is frequently enhanced with Wesley's adjectives for God's power and ability to inspire fear. As Wesley progresses through the hymn, his dependence upon the Psalm becomes less and he moves away from strict adherence to the message of the Psalm and begins to add his own interpretation. It is to this interpretation in Wesley's own words that we turn our attention in the next section.

WESLEY'S WORDS

In the early stanzas of the hymn, Wesley's words are confined to additions and amendments to his quotations of the Psalmist and to the middle of the stanza, generally lines three and four.

In the first stanza, Wesley adds some description to the assertion that Israel came out of Egypt. As we mentioned previously he replaces the Psalmist's picture of departing from a strange people with the imagery of escape from an oppressor. He follows this up with lines five and six which are his own, "Supported by the great I AM, Safe in the hollow of his hand." While these lines are clearly Wesley's own addition and nowhere to be found in the Psalm text, Wesley does not conjure them up out of thin air. They too, are grounded in the imagery of the Exodus tradition. The name I AM for God is clearly dependent on the Exodus 3 scene in which the Lord tells Moses that he is to tell the Israelites that I AM has sent him. In the AV text this title is printed in all capital letters just as it is in Wesley's hymn. Likewise, the hand imagery of the following line is grounded in the Exodus tradition. Particularly in the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15:6ff) the Lord's right hand is used as a image of the power of God in defeating the Egyptians. In Wesley's hymn, however, the right hand imagery is transformed into the presence and comfort imagery which Christians often associate with the hand of God. This comfort imagery seems almost out of character with the image of God we have seen Wesley deliberately portraying in the adjustments he has made to the Psalmist's wording throughout the hymn. However, his own words both begin and conclude the hymn with images of comfort indicating that Wesley may have attempted to retain the Biblical balance between God as frightening and wholly other and God as near and compassionate.

Wesley's own words in the second stanza are limited to lines two and four. In each case they appear to function as intentional parallels with the previous lines. The second line further modifies the description given in line one of the sea fleeing with the phrase, "Disparted by the wondrous rod." This imagery is again drawn from the Exodus

story in which the sea is described as being divided when Moses raises his “rod” over it.⁶⁴ The fourth line appears intended to add an additional example to the geographic locations which God’s presence impacts. It stands in parallel to the description of the river Jordan’s reversal and reads, “And Sinai felt th’incumbent God.” This line immediately precedes the claim that mountains and hills skipped and leaped. The Exodus tradition again appears to be in view here. Sinai dominates the book of Exodus and in particular is singled out as the place upon which God’s presence descends. Since the fourth stanza indicates that the cause of all this quaking and shaking is the presence of God, it seems significant to note that in the Exodus account of the Lord’s descent onto Mt. Sinai the text describes the mountain quaking when the presence of God descends upon it (Exodus 19:18). The addition of these parallel lines in the second stanza seem intentionally designed to reflect the majesty of God over nature and use imagery from the Exodus narrative to do so.

In the third stanza, Wesley’s own words are again confined to the third and fourth lines. He follows the Psalmist’s questioning motif throughout this stanza, adding questions of his own in lines three and four. Line three, “Was nature’s God displeased with thee?” again reiterates Wesley’s imagery which depicts the presence of God inspiring fear and trembling and obedience in these inanimate geographical formations. In this series of questions Wesley wonders what would make the presence of God fearful to the sea, river and mountains, and posits that God was angry at them. Line four again appears to depict the descent of God upon the mountain and its trembling in response. The question, “And why should hills or mountains shake?” appears to have the implied answer that God is so mighty that all creation trembles at God’s presence.

In the final two stanzas Wesley’s own voice comes through much clearer. The fourth stanza begins in the Psalmist’s words with the exhortation to the earth to tremble in God’s presence. However, the four lines which follow and flesh out the description of this

⁶⁴ See in particular Exodus 14:16 AV.

God whom the earth is to fear are independent of the Psalmist and even fairly independent of the Exodus narrative. Mention is made of God's rod, an Exodus image which has already been used by Wesley in this hymn to describe God's power in parting the sea. The remainder of the lines, however, appear to be independent of discernible sources and seem to reflect Wesley's own description of God's majesty whose presence causes nature to tremble. The third line, "Whose power inverted nature owns," appears to play off of the previous ironies in the imagery for God's power - rivers running upstream, and solid mountains shaking. The idea that nature can be reversed demonstrates to Wesley in a powerful way that God is sovereign, as he acknowledges in the next line, "Her only law his sovereign word."

It seems possible that given Wesley's historical setting there may be a polemical aspect to the word choice he employs in these lines. The previously mentioned irony in nature acting precisely contrary to its normal course and the choice of the word law to refer to what governs nature may indicate that Wesley wishes to impress upon his people, who might be tempted to view the world in a Deistic fashion, that nature only operates as God commands it to. This stands in opposition to the Deistic view of a "distant God," apathetic with regard to the course of human events as well as Deism's characteristic skepticism with regard to the miraculous in history. The sovereignty of God over nature is emphasized here in a powerful way, and Wesley misses no opportunity to point out the miraculous nature of what he is claiming. He concludes this stanza with the imagery of heaven bowing down to God. This merismus from earth in the first line to heaven in the last encompasses the whole of the known universe worshipping God. It seems intended to include all those in between, particularly in light of the addition of "all thy sons" (line 1). There is a wholeness about those whom Wesley expects to acknowledge God's sovereignty and join in the worship. All are included - heaven and earth and all those in between.

The final stanza continues along the path begun in the fourth stanza. Wesley picks up on this notion that the course of nature and even the laws which govern the way it is expected to function can be changed or even reversed because of the power and majesty of God. It begins, "Creation varied by his hand, Th'omnipotent Jehovah knows!" The idea that God's power is exemplified in the ability to change creation is laid out in this line in continuation of the thought begun in the previous stanza. Wesley then follows up this idea with two quick examples of this change which God has accomplished, "The sea is turned to solid land, the rock into a fountain flows." This evidence that God has changed nature and is able to change nature appears to be designed to lead up to the final lines which form the climax of the hymn and the point to which the entire hymn has been leading, "And all things as they change proclaim the Lord eternally the same." This affirmation brings back the element of comfort which we saw in the initial stanza and envelops the entire hymn in a cloak of comfort and security. This final statement assures the singer that no matter how the world changes, God will always be the God who is powerful enough to contradict the known laws of nature by splitting the sea, moving mountains, reversing rivers and bringing water out of a rock. This powerful God is a God of transformation who brought the world into being, reserves the right to change the way it operates and, on a more personal level, transforms the lives entrusted to this God's care. This is the God in whom the singer has put her trust and in whom, Wesley insists, that trust is well placed.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Wesley's contemporization of the text of Psalm 114 can enlighten our study of worship in several ways. First of all, Wesley adjusts the form of the Psalm to fit the contexts of worship in his own day. The eight line Psalm is expanded into a five verse hymn with regular meter and rhyme scheme. These adjustments make no significant changes to the theological statement being made by the Psalm, but make it singable for Christians in Wesley's day. Second, Wesley updates the imagery adding details he feels

necessary for the Christian of his day to fully recognize the picture of God being painted by the Psalmist. Thus the fear and terror imagery which we observed being added to the Psalm quotations throughout the hymn served to illustrate for the 18th century worshipper what the ancient worshipper would have immediately recognized - that this God being approached to be praised was not to be taken lightly. Wesley also adds imagery of peace and comfort which speak his people's needs in their own imagery and language. The safety of God's hand is a thoroughly modern, Christian image which is certainly not the sort of hand imagery employed in the Exodus account, but its addition here serves to image comfort in the presence of God. Finally, Wesley has imported the concerns about the nature of God from his own day - God as distant, God as bound by the laws of nature - and used Biblical imagery to rebut these concerns. Wesley's orthodoxy in claiming that God is above creation cannot be challenged because of his dependence on Biblical revelation to make his claims. It is clear that he is talking about the God of the Bible, the God of Moses, the God of David and most importantly the God of Jesus, because he grounds his claims about God's nature in what God has done. The theology presented in the hymn, that God is mighty and sovereign over creation, is grounded in the stories of God's people. Because Wesley tells the story the events are relived and reinterpreted for the needs of his own day. Just as Pharaoh and the Egyptians who would not let the people go because they did not know God were drowned in the mighty acts of God so the hymn intends to drown the fears and doubts which arise in the people because of claims that God is limited by the laws of nature.

Chart of Interchange quotations of Psalm 114 in the Hymn

When Israel out of Egypt came, Psalm 114:1

*And left the proud oppressor's land,
Supported by the great I AM,
Safe in the hollow of his hand,
The Lord in Israel reigned alone,
And Judah was his fav'rite throne. Psalm 114:2*

The sea beheld his power, and fled, Psalm 114:3a

*Disparted by the wondrous rod;
Jordan ran backward to his head, Psalm 114:3b*

*And Sinai felt th'incumbent God;
The mountains skipped like frightened rams, Psalm 114:4
The hills leaped after them as lambs.*

What ailed thee, O thou trembling sea,

*What horror turned the river back? Psalm 114:5
Was nature's God displeased with thee?*

*And why should hills or mountains shake?
Ye mountains huge, that skipped like rams, Psalm 114:6
Ye hills, that leaped as frightened lambs!*

Earth, tremble on, with all thy sons, Psalm 114:7

*In presence of thy awful Lord!
Whose power inverted nature owns,
Her only law his sovereign word:
He shakes the centre with his rod,
And heaven bows down to Jacob's God.*

Creation varied by his hand

*Th'omnipotent Jehovah knows!
The sea is turned to solid land,
The rock into a fountain flows, Psalm 114:8
And all things as they change proclaim
The Lord eternally the same.⁶⁵*

⁶⁵ Hymn 214 in *The Works of John Wesley: A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists* vol. 7. ed. Franz Hildebrandt and Oliver A Beckerlegge (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 348-9.

Chapter 5

Fight the Good Fight of Faith: Jesus the Divine Warrior

*Jesus, my King, to thee I bow,
Enlisted under thy command;
Captain of my salvation, thou
Shalt lead me to the promised land.*

*Thou hast a great deliverance wrought,
The staff from off my shoulder broke,
Out of the house of bondage brought,
And freed me from th'Egyptian yoke.*

*O'er the vast howling wilderness
To Canaan's bounds thou hast me led;
Thou bidst me now the land possess,
And on thy milk and honey feed.*

*I see an open door of hope,
Legions of sins in vain oppose;
Bold I with thee, my Head, march up,
And triumph o'er a world of foes.*

*Gigantic lusts come forth to fight,
I mark, disdain, and all break through;
I tread them down in Jesu's might --
Through Jesus I can all things do.*

*Lo! the tall sons of Anak rise!
Who can the sons of Anak meet?
Captain, to thee I lift mine eyes,
And lo! they fall beneath my feet.*

*Passion, and appetite, and pride
(Pride, my old, dreadful, tyrant-foe),
I see cast down on every side,
And conqu'ring I to conquer go.*

*My Lord in my behalf appears --
Captain, thy strength-inspiring eye
Scatters my doubts, dispels my fears,
And makes the host of aliens fly.*

*Who can before my Captain stand?
Who is so great a King as mine?
High over all is thy right hand,
And might and majesty are thine.⁶⁶*

⁶⁶ Hymn 284 in The Works of John Wesley: A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists vol. 7. ed. Franz Hildebrandt and Oliver A Beckerlegge (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 435-6.

This hymn was first published in *Hymns and Sacred Poems* in 1742, originally entitled, “Fight the Good Fight of Faith.” It draws explicitly on a number of biblical texts including 2 Timothy 4:7, Joshua 23:5, I Chronicles 11:14, Isaiah 9:4, Exodus 20:20, Deuteronomy 2:10,21 and 32:10. This most explicitly Christian hymn of the examples we have studied makes free use of the imagery of the biblical Exodus, transposing this imagery directly into Christian characterization of Jesus and rhetoric concerning the nature of salvation and the Christian life.

IDENTIFICATION OF EXODUS ALLUSIONS

The first three stanzas of the hymn set up Charles Wesley’s programmatic association of the Exodus event with the person of Jesus Christ. We will establish that it is the biblical Exodus upon which Wesley is drawing his imagery in order that we may later make some observations about the way in which he applies this imagery to Christ.

The first chapter sets up a military image, calling Jesus the singers’ king. This kingship image is not one of a regal and majestic power but rather a military power. This may be clearly discerned in the following lines in which the singer proclaims herself, “enlisted” under Christ’s “command.” Additionally, the term “captain” is applied to further modify the title of king.⁶⁷ This sort of military kingship image is not at all foreign to the worldview of the Exodus. As Fretheim and others have pointed out there is an element of irony in the way the Exodus narrative is laid out with regard to the question of the nature of true kingship. The pharaoh is repeatedly called the king by the narrator but the only one ever said to “reign” within the book is the LORD of whom it is said in Exodus 15:18, “The LORD shall reign forever and ever.” (AV) It is in the context of a hymn celebrating the Lord’s victory over the Egyptian army at the sea, in the midst of a

⁶⁷ Tyson identifies the phrase “Captain of salvation” as one of Charles Wesley’s preferred Christological titles in his later hymns. “Captain,” for example occurs no fewer than 13 times in his 1749 *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, 491.

song which proclaims, “The LORD *is* a man of war: the LORD *is* his name.” (Exodus 15:3 AV) that we finally have a king proclaimed who participates in the true activity of kingship -- reigning. In contrast Pharaoh is portrayed as a pretender to the throne. One who calls himself the king but does not reign. Rather the LORD who reigns triumphs over this pretender and delivers the people by military might. This linking of military might and true kingship is an Exodus image utilized by Wesley in this first stanza.

The first stanza also makes reference to the explicit goal of the Exodus. This stanza concludes with the assertion that Jesus, “Shalt lead me to the promised land.” The title “promised land” is not found in Biblical usage. However, Moses makes reference to the observance of the Passover, “when ye be come to the land which the LORD will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service,” (Exodus 12:25 AV) and the story of the Exodus with its implication that the LORD promised the land of Canaan to the Israelites is certainly the basis for the later titling of the land of Canaan, “the promised land.”

While the first stanza shares images and ideas with the Exodus narrative, the second stanza demonstrates Wesley’s intentionality in drawing upon biblical Exodus imagery much more clearly. He begins with the statement that, “Thou hast a great deliverance wrought.” This idea of deliverance is explicit in the text as the Lord’s intention in sending Moses into Egypt. At the burning bush the Lord proclaims, “I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians.” (Exodus 3:8 AV) While it cannot be proven for certain that Wesley alluded to this specific speech of God in Exodus 3:8 in referring to a great “deliverance,” it is clear by the other references which surround this usage that Wesley is referring on at least one level to the deliverance of the historical Exodus.⁶⁸ The stanza closes with two explicit references to the slavery of the Israelites in Egypt. The first, “house of bondage,” is a fairly clear allusion to Moses’ designation of

⁶⁸ More will be said about what Wesley might be implying on another level in the sections which follow.

Egypt as the “house of bondage,” in Exodus 13:3, 13:14 and 20:2. These same exact words are used in the Authorized Version in the same order and in the same context. Additionally, this reference to the “house of bondage,” is immediately followed by a parallel claim that Jesus, “freed me from th’Egyptian yoke.” This explicit mention of Egypt as the source of the oppression from which the reader is freed cements the conclusion that the preceding references have been to the biblical Exodus from Egypt.

The third stanza builds upon the reader’s growing perception that the Exodus is being alluded to by following it closely with references to the wilderness wanderings and promised land. Explicit mention is made of the wilderness itself, an exceedingly common term in the book of Exodus occurring 22 times in the Authorized Version of the text. In addition, Canaan is specifically singled out by name as the goal of the journey. The description of the land as flowing with milk and honey is alluded to in the phrasing, “and on thy milk and honey feed.” This expectation that the land of Canaan would flow with milk and honey appears to have its source in the book of Exodus as Exodus 3:8, 3:17, 13:5 and 33:3 all use this exact word pairing in this order with the location being described always being the land into which God is bringing the people, frequently accompanied by the specification that this is the land of the Canaanites, or the land which God promised to give to the people, i.e. the promised land. In any case, it is quite clear that the land flowing with milk and honey referred to in the text is the same thing as the land of Canaan to which this stanza refers.

A handful of other references link this hymn to the Exodus narrative. The sixth stanza makes reference to the sons of Anak. This group is not explicitly mentioned in the book of Exodus, but may be found in the book of Numbers within the context of the wilderness wanderings which followed the historical Exodus. The sons of Anak were the inhabitants of the land which the people were to possess and were the source of the fearsome report which Moses’ spies brought back that the land was filled with giants. (Num. 13:33). Finally, in the concluding ninth stanza reference is made to the mighty

“right hand,” of the Lord. This is a common Biblical image, but in light of the very explicit connections between this hymn and the Exodus narratives and to the Song of the Sea in particular it can be reasonably asserted that this reference to God’s right hand alludes to the references to the Lord’s right hand as an instrument of war in Exodus 15:6 and 12. This return to references to the Lord’s military might specifically those drawn from the song of the sea forms a potential inclusion framing the hymn’s opening and closing with images of the Lord being praised as a mighty warrior.

WESLEY’S WORDS

The first thing one notices in reading through this hymn is that although Wesley utilizes Exodus terms, themes and imagery, the battle and triumph he describes are not those of the drowning of the historical Egyptians or the deliverance of the historical Israelites from slavery in the ancient nation of Egypt. Some other battle, some other triumph of God is being cloaked in the imagery and terms of the Exodus. This text is an example of Charles Wesley’s allegorical use of Biblical texts by which, as we will see, he, “shaped biblical passages into Christological dramas that communicated the essence and experience of the gospel to the singers of his day.”⁶⁹

The reader’s first clue that Wesley is poetically utilizing this imagery on some level other than the literally obvious is the first word of the hymn - Jesus. While Christians believe that Jesus Christ is God incarnate and that this God made manifest in Jesus Christ is the God described in the pages of the Old Testament and therefore the God who delivered Israel from bondage in Egypt; Christianity is also a historical faith which recognizes the progression in the revelation of God through time. It would be an anachronism to refer to the God of the historical Exodus as Jesus. This leads us to the assumption that Wesley has inserted the name of Jesus into the midst of all this Exodus imagery with some higher purpose than variety in names for God. His usage

⁶⁹ Tyson, 444.

communicates the connectedness of the triune God's activity through time, but it indicates as well that he is transforming the imagery of the Exodus to refer to something accomplished by Christ himself, as distinguished from the activity of the triune God prior to the revelation of Jesus Christ.

What then, is the victory to which Wesley refers? Some hints may be found throughout the hymn. First, the initial stanza makes reference to Christ as the "captain of my salvation." One can infer from this statement that either Wesley or the singer may consider himself the beneficiary of the victory to which the hymn refers. Additionally, the usage of the term "salvation" within Wesleyan writings carries a load of specific theological freight. Charles Wesley was a man of his times and we cannot escape the issues which dominated theology during his time in any discussion of his work. The eighteenth century was a time of turmoil within the church as Protestant groups continued to distinguish themselves from one another and from Roman Catholicism theologically. The Wesleys led a theological renewal of the Anglican Church which may be described as evangelical. As an eighteenth century "evangelist," Wesley's understanding of the term salvation would have carried with it heavy connotations of his brother's famous concern for one's desire to "flee the wrath to come." In short, salvation would have meant at the very least rescue from eternal damnation. However, the Wesleys were not typically so narrow in their understanding of salvation. Charles Wesley apparently associated the completion of the Holy Spirit's perfecting work in a person's life with salvation as well. His collection of "Hymns for those that wait for full salvation," was a collection devoted to the expectation of entire sanctification.⁷⁰ Within the context of a Wesleyan hymn this assertion that Jesus is the "captain of my salvation" appears to indicate that Wesley is

⁷⁰ T. Chrichton Mitchell, *Charles Wesley: Man with the Dancing Heart* (Kansas City: MO, Beacon Hill Press, 1994), 169.

making veiled reference to Jesus' life, death and resurrection on behalf of the believer.

This idea is fleshed out more fully in the stanzas which follow.

The second stanza asserts that "deliverance" has been accomplished. This deliverance is clothed in the garb of deliverance from slavery and rescue from the house of bondage. Since the first stanza set the underlying layer of reference for this imagery within the salvific work of Jesus Christ on behalf of the believer, in order to illuminate this imagery one must ask what the believer is being delivered from. A possible referent is the expectation that we are delivered from a future in hell. This sort of expectation certainly falls well within the Christian culture and theology of Wesley's day. However, the hymn appears to insist that the singer has actually suffered under the slavery from which she is freed. This is not a deliverance from some future condition which has not yet been experienced but deliverance from an oppression which was ongoing at the time of the deliverance. The imagery of being set free from the house of bondage, being set free from the "Egyptian yoke," indicates that Wesley sees the condition of believers prior to their conversion as oppressive and the Christian life as one of freedom. The use of the term "yoke" is interesting in light of its New Testament usage. Certainly Wesley was aware that Jesus had referred to commitment to him using the statement, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:30 AV) The yoke of Christ stands in sharp contrast to the yoke which Wesley asserts Christ frees the believer from. So what is the believer being delivered from? The most plausible explanation, at this point, although by no means a certainty, is that Wesley is referring to Christ's deliverance of the believer from "slavery to sin and death."⁷¹ This idea makes sense of the idea within the hymn that salvation sets

⁷¹ Wesley would have been familiar with this idea from Pauline literature including Romans 7:23-25. Also Wesley's concept of salvation as deliverance from slavery is evident also in his wording of verse four of his famous hymn, "And Can It Be," which depicts life before Christ as imprisonment, The United Methodist Hymnal (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 363.

the believer free from some current oppression and like the Israelites of old, frees the believer for true service to and relationship with the risen Lord.⁷²

The metaphor does not end with the assertion that like the Israelites, we are set free for relationship with the living God. Just as the story of the Exodus proceeds on into the wilderness and promised land, Wesley carries the imagery on as well. The wilderness and promised land are brought into the picture in the third stanza. The expectation that the believer go ahead and possess the promised land now⁷³ discounts the possibility that the promised land is some conception of heaven or eternal life beyond the grave as it has so often been utilized in Christian imagery. The idea that the believer is expected to possess the land now is modified by the additional and apparently consequent idea that the believer will also feed on milk and honey. This seems to be a fairly standard pairing with possession of the promised land, but Wesley makes a key alteration to the expectation. This milk and honey is Christ's. The possessive pronoun "thy" modifies milk and honey in this statement. This is not milk and honey which just happens to be located in the promised land which the believer is exhorted to possess, but it is something bestowed by Christ himself.

The stanzas which follow give significant clues as to the referent of the "promised land" allusion. The singer's response to the recognition that the Lord has commanded her to possess the promised land is that a way of hope appears. What is the singer's opposition through this doorway of hope? The next line reads, "Legions of sins in vain oppose." The four stanzas which follow the assertion that the believer may expect to possess the promised land all focus on the believers' struggle with sin. Each of these stanzas present a temptation to the singer. The first is the most general, "legions of sins." The second describes "gigantic lusts." and the final mentions, "passion, and appetite and

⁷² See Fretheim, 22 and Durham, xxiii on the relationship between freedom and service in Exodus.

⁷³ See line 11, "Thou bidst me now the land possess."

pride.”⁷⁴ The third of these four stanzas portrays the temptations to sin with the allusion to the sons of Anak. Like the spies sent into Canaan in the singer’s eyes the temptation appears overwhelmingly large and impossible to defeat. In each instance the stanza concludes with some assertion that through Jesus the foe is defeated.

From this examination of the stanzas which describe the believer’s response to the invitation to possess the land, it seems possible to assert a few things about the theology of salvation being presented by the hymn. It appears that the promised land is not a future occurrence unattainable until death in the mind of Wesley. We have already asserted that it is not only to be associated with eternal life in heaven following death based on the encouragement of the believer to go ahead and possess it now. It also appears to be something which could be prevented by yielding to the temptation to sin, since the inhabitants of the land as well as the foes barring the entrance are the temptation to sin. It seems that what Wesley is driving at is that the promised land is the total dedication of the believer’s life to perfect love of God. Here possession of the promised land is part of the deliverance. The deliverance of the believer from slavery to sin and death is not complete until the believer progresses into full communion with Christ.

The hymn closes with exaltation of the Christ who has accomplished this salvation which the believer receives. Christ is presented as the one who triumphs on the believer’s behalf with the eighth stanza evoking images of God’s appearance and the Egyptians’ resulting terrified flight at the sea in its description of Christ’s appearance and triumph over all the believers foes which are now extended to include doubts and fears. The God who accomplishes this salvation is described as incomparably great and is ascribed “might” and “majesty,” demonstrating the appropriate response to rescue from slavery to sin and death through the victory of Christ.

⁷⁴ It seems possible that an additional allusion to the Exodus is imbedded here. Pride is described as “my old dreadful, tyrant-foe.” Pharaoh, long portrayed as the tyrant in Jewish and Christian writings on the Exodus, is felled by his pride in the Exodus story.

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

It seems that several insights about Wesleyan theology may be drawn from the usage of Exodus imagery in this hymn. First, there are faint hints of the classic Christus Victor theory of atonement. As we noticed previously, the hymn both opens and closes with warrior imagery applied to Christ. This warrior imagery is reminiscent of the Divine Warrior motif in the Song of the Sea and like texts in which the Lord is portrayed as doing battle on behalf of the Israelites. In the hymn's portrayal of Christ's work on our behalf Christ is portrayed as doing battle on behalf of the believer with the powers of sin and death and with the temptations to return to a life of sin following deliverance. The cross, and the resurrection of Christ are never mentioned in the hymn, yet its effects are discussed at length through veiled references to the mighty victory of Christ. This warrior-like image of Christ battling on behalf of the believer places the work of Christ within the Biblical portrayal of the triune God and images the deliverance of the believer from sin as a new Exodus, a release from bondage to which there is no need to return.

Second, as we have already pointed out the soteriology of the hymn is explicitly focused on salvation as involving the whole of the Christian life, not merely a solution for the problem of life after death. The believer is portrayed as set free from slavery to sin and death for the express purpose of communion with Christ and living out the abundant life expected by Christ through total rejection of the life of sin. The life of the believer is portrayed as a triumphant one in which Christ's victory continues to be effective in daily struggles enabling the believer to put down a whole host of threats to her ongoing fellowship with Christ.

Finally, in this hymn the Lord is the one who fights on behalf of the Christian. The Christian, like the Israelite at the sea, is not expected to have to fight the battle with sin and death herself. The assertions that Christ, "hast a great deliverance wrought," and that he is the one who, "makes the host of aliens fly," counteract any Pelagian tendency in the exhortation to go ahead and possess the land. In true Wesleyan fashion the tension

between the believers' earnest desire for full salvation and the gracious God given nature of this salvation are held together within the hymn. The believer recognizes throughout the hymn that it is only through Christ that the salvation described is accomplished and not through the work of the believer.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

We have seen through this hymn that powerful statements of theology may be imbedded in allusive use of language. The hymn embodies a Christological re-reading of the Exodus narrative in which our deliverance from slavery to sin and death are seen through the eyes and images of the Exodus deliverance. Our Christian faith is one embedded in the stories of its past, and one which may be more fully understood through full utilization of those images. Wesley's creative use of the Exodus imagery allows the believer to see herself delivered, and to experience as a part of the new Israel the joy of new found freedom to love and serve Christ. It sets up an opportunity for the Christian believer to join in the refrain, "The Lord is a man of war, the Lord is his name," (Exodus 15:3) with meaning and relevance. While Christians throughout the modern period have shied away from warrior imagery for God, frequently thinking it outdated and replaced by the more socially acceptable gentle Jesus; Wesley reclaims this imagery in a way which affirms the New Testament's testimony to a loving, compassionate God revealed in the humble person of Jesus Christ, but does not sacrifice the Old Testaments consistent testimony to that compassionate, redemptive God's mighty, awe-inspiring power. Wesley's creative allusion and skillful weaving of New Testament faith into the stories and images of the Old Testament provide a hopeful pattern for the continued use of Old Testament texts in the worship lives of faithful Christian congregations. In Charles Wesley's hymnwriting, "We are not spectators of the events; rather, . . . we become actors in the narrative."⁷⁵ The singer is not merely invited to stand on the shore and

⁷⁵ Tyson, 444.

celebrate the great deliverance of God in this hymn text, but is encouraged to walk out of slavery alongside the people of God. The good news of Christ's atonement which accomplishes liberation from slavery to sin and death is recounted in this text in such a way that a fresh encounter with the living, liberating Christ is possible in worship. Our modern use of texts in worship may be challenged by Wesley's example to provide remembrances of God's liberating nature and salvific activity in Jesus Christ which make that deliverance present in the experience of the worshipper.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

We have examined two Psalms and two Charles Wesley hymns composed with the events of the Exodus in view. We have plausibly demonstrated that their use of Exodus imagery was both intentional and creative. Let us briefly consider what we have learned about the potential uses of this narrative in worship.

INSIGHTS FROM OUR STUDY

The examination of Psalm 77 demonstrated that our own personal feelings of doubt, confusion and uncertainty are not isolated events of our own time. This study demonstrated that worship would be enriched by an effort to examine our own spiritual struggles in light of the stories of the people of God because these stories provide grounding for discovering ourselves within the stories of the people of God. This perspective permits us to recognize our continuity with the entire household of faith and the steadfastness of God's character. Secondly, this study demonstrated that recounting of the stories of the past permits a grounding for hope even in the bleakest circumstances. Like the Psalmist, today's worshippers may look to the stories of God's mighty deeds in the past with the hope that the same God who performed deliverance in the past may deliver yet again.

The study of Psalm 78 demonstrated that the people of God may participate fully in God's deliverance in the past by reliving and responding in light of those events in their own time. The events of history are not seen as static completed realities but as realities which inform and reform current experience. This sort of remembering is what the New Testament writers meant by *ἀνάμνησις*, the idea that active remembrance continued the story and mediated the presence of the living Christ. As such, the Christian faith has become an anamnetic faith which carries on the life of Christ through active remembrance of Christ in worship and resulting activity as his body in the world. In this sense remembrance is sacramental, mediating the grace and deliverance of God to current

situations. This is world construction which references the past in order to mediate God's salvific activity in the past to the present and make it available for the future. The events of the past and the example of the people's response to those events with praise provide a call to worship for the current worshipper to respond through reliving and remembering.

The Charles Wesley hymn, "When Israel out of Egypt Came" informs our worship in several ways. First, it illustrates the potential for straightforward use of Psalm texts with adjustment to fit into the stylistic demands of the current day. Second, it illustrates the manner in which knowledge of one's audience may allow a more accurate expression of the message of Biblical texts. Wesley understood the powerful and awe-inspiring imagery of God in the Psalm text and highlighted this message of the Psalm by adding additional imagery which emphasized this idea to the singers of his day, who he realized may have been prone to miss this imagery because of their own tendencies to emphasize the compassionate and forgiving nature of God to the exclusion of other images. Finally, it illustrates the manner in which sung stories may defend orthodoxy against attacks while providing peace and stability for the singer. The story expressed in the hymn illustrates God's character as well as the connectedness of the present and experience. The singer is to be reassured that God has not changed and that God remains the mighty, powerful force which delivered the people from Egypt, and may continue to transform both the creation and the lives of those who place their trust in this powerful God.

The second Charles Wesley hymn, "Fight the Good Fight of Faith," demonstrates that the stories of the Old and New Testaments may be woven together in Christian worship with powerful effect. We may express the continuity of God's interaction with human beings throughout time through recognition of the similarities between what God has done for us in Christ and what God has done prior to Christ in history. The allegorical use of an Old Testament story of deliverance became the platform for the singer not only to recount the deliverances of God, but to experience that deliverance for herself. The hymn places God's mighty acts in delivering the people from Egypt within the experience

of the singer allowing her to experience the liberating presence of the living Christ and her own deliverance from slavery to sin and death. This example challenges modern worship leaders to view the Biblical texts with a Christological eye, seeing Christ's deliverance as an ongoing experience which is prefigured and illustrated in pre-Christian texts and which may be mediated and experienced through exploration of these typologies in Christian worship.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Since we have observed that the creative use of Old Testament narrative texts in Judeo-Christian worship is a legitimate practice with ample Biblical and post-Biblical precedent, are we then ready to endorse wholesale the idea that any text may be used in any creative way which seems appropriate to the hymn writer? It seems that some basic limits can be placed on the practice which are both faithful to the examples we have set forth and preserve the integrity of Christian worship.

First, any use of Biblical materials must be faithful to their meaning in their original context. We have seen in our examples various different applications made of the same Exodus narratives. One author saw primarily the majesty of God, while another saw that majesty as a call to worship. One author highlighted the believer's joy at the deliverance another highlighted the hope of the believer not currently experiencing that deliverance for its future fulfillment based in the delivering nature of God. None of these applications imported meaning foreign to the potential within the text being cited. None of the hymn writers violated the intention of the Biblical story. A writer could, conceivably, have utilized Exodus imagery, but allowed the forces of chaos associated with Pharaoh to have the upper hand. The Israelites could have returned to bondage, or the God portrayed could have been vindictive rather than compassionate. Any of these portrayals, however fully cloaked in the images of the Exodus, would have violated the message of the text and been therefore, an improper use of the Biblical materials. If our concern is to utilize Biblical imagery and narratives in order to preserve the memory of the people of God and

to create a world in which God's nature is more fully known, then our usage of these Biblical materials must be faithful to their intended usage.

Second, narratives utilized should be viewed holistically. We must be careful to tell the whole story. A hymnwriter might find extensive personal and cultural relevance in the account of the plagues in Egypt. This cosmic imagery might be employed to give the people a voice with which to speak about the destruction of their world which they see occurring through pollution, nuclear testing or any other environmental catastrophe. However, any usage of the plague narrative which does not take into account the redemptive scheme of God at work in the events of the plagues and which does not function to reveal God as the plagues were designed to do, falls short of the goal of creating a world in which God is more fully known and amounts to taking texts out of context in our worship. The writers whose hymns we read did not leave the children of Israel in the midst of the Red Sea. The deliverance was completed. The fullest example of this is the Charles Wesley hymn, "Fight the Good Fight of Faith" in which the singer is exhorted to go on into the promised land. The story has an intended conclusion, and our retelling of the stories should not stop with the introduction or even the climax, but should respect the integrity of the Biblical narratives by applying the whole of the story, up unto the point of its natural conclusion.

Third, our use of narratives should be canonical. With the exception of Charles Wesley's "When Israel out of Egypt Came," the writers whose Psalms and hymns we read utilized the significant aspects of the entire canonical witness they had. The nature of God may be essentially unchanging, and that is an important doctrine which we proclaim in historical allusions within worship; however our understanding of the nature of God has grown and deepened through time. Specifically, for the Christian the fullest revelation of the nature of God has come in the person of Jesus Christ. This added revelation should be allowed to inform and fill out our use of narrative imagery to describe the nature of God. For worship to be truly Christian it must celebrate the redemptive activity of God in the

person of Jesus Christ. Worship which utilizes Old Testament imagery without the lens of New Testament hope does not tell the whole story of God's redemption. Patrick Miller describes the relationship in this way using the example of the Psalms, "The Psalms draw us to Jesus, make us think of him; they gain their specificity, their reality for us, their concreteness, in the revelation of Jesus. But it is the case, also that the interaction works the other way, and our thinking and interpretation and our preaching about Jesus of Nazareth needs to be in conversation with the Psalms, for the Psalms provide some of the fundamental context for what the reality of Jesus is as salvation, light, hope, deliverance, shepherd."⁷⁶ If we are to see the whole story of the redemptive activity of God celebrated in the narratives of the Old Testament, as Christians we must see them through the lens of Jesus Christ. His revelation is the fullest and most concrete embodiment of God's redemptive activity and to tell the stories of the Old Testament without this fullest embodiment is to miss their final point. This conversation described by Miller provides enlightenment to both texts and a more profound experience of Christian worship, as we saw with "Fight the Good Fight of Faith," in which Old Testament imagery was given a powerful new referent in the current life of faith, through the person of Jesus Christ.

Finally, our use of Old Testament narratives should be sacramental. By this I mean that our use of Old Testament narratives should communicate the past to the present in such a way that the past is made present and the grace of God experienced in the original event is available to the current worshipper. In each of the examples we looked at a specific event in the past was recalled and recited, but the memory was not limited to cognitive repetition of the facts of the event. The memory evoked a response to the presence of God in the life of the worshipper. The despondent believer in Psalm 77 was again awed by the power of God's redemptive activity in the Exodus as if he was standing on the banks of the Red Sea himself. The hope produced by the recollection of these

⁷⁶ Patrick Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 27-28.

events was enough to propel the worshipper into hope and worship of the God who made the redemption at the sea possible. The invitation to re-enact the Passover embedded in the retelling of the Exodus events in Psalm 78 makes the past present through retelling and re-living of the story. The worshipper is invited to participate in the life of God's redeemed people, to celebrate God's election of them as a people. The Wesleyan hymn, "Fight the Good Fight of Faith," allows the worshipper to recount her own struggles in the difficult road towards full salvation while at the same time recounting and celebrating Christ's victory over sin both universally and in her own life. This mediation of the past into the present is vital to worship which makes the Old Testament narratives both lively and truly worship. Our worship should open up the possibility for grace filled encounters with the Lord,⁷⁷ not merely for the repetition of ideas. If our worship is to truly perform this function, our telling of the story must move beyond mere repetition of the facts to a creative retelling, and indeed re-living of the salvific activities of God.

POTENTIAL USES OF NARRATIVES IN CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Having examined some limits on the ways in which Old Testament narratives may plausibly be utilized in Christian worship, let us examine some possible creative starting points for the implementation of Old Testament narrative allusions in Christian worship today.

The use of Old Testament narratives may begin with some shared experience either personal or corporate to which the narrative speaks. We have seen examples of this in several of the hymns we have looked at. The personal feeling of abandonment by the Psalmist of 77, the national crisis of Psalm 78 and the common Christian struggle with sin in "Fight the Good Fight of Faith," are all examples of an author relating an experience to the text. Brueggemann claims that, "the work of the people in liturgy is to process shared

⁷⁷ For this thought I am indebted to Lester Ruth who claimed that "sacraments are not just things we do but encounters we graciously arrange," in "Christ, baptizer with the Holy Spirit," lecture to WO 515, Asbury Theological Seminary, Orlando, FL, 27 February 2003.

experience through the normative narratives, images, metaphors and symbols of that community.”⁷⁸ This group processing of experience may take many forms. This sort of worship arises out of the needs of the people. The need for closure in a time of national crisis, the need for community in a time of personal feelings of alienation or the need for affirmation of God’s victory in periods of struggle send worshippers searching into the text for help in their time of need. The remembering which flows out of this search is remembering which is already applied. The re-living is already going on in the lives of the worshippers, all that is needed is the text with which to discuss and understand it.

This creative retelling may be most readily applicable to times of personal or social crisis, but its necessity is not limited to such times. Our daily living out of the Christian faith is a life undergirded and supported by the gracious activity of God. The celebration and retelling of these events invite us to continue to walk in faith and obedience.⁷⁹ Our worlds are shaped by the way in which we view them. As Christians immersed in daily, active remembrance of the gracious presence and activity of God through Jesus Christ our world becomes an encounter with the God who created it, a life lived in the presence of God through Jesus Christ. As Christians in ministry to the whole world, our own worlds must be formed by the recognition of the specific God revealed in the Old and New Testaments. We will most faithfully proclaim and imitate the nature of God when our lives are immersed in God’s presence through the active remembering and re-living of God’s redemptive activity on our behalf.

We may use active remembrance of God’s activity in the past in order to express our hope for and shape the future. Much of the Christian faith is founded on hope for the future. We proclaim that Christ will come again and that he has gone to prepare a place for us. The hope which we have in Christ is grounded in God’s redemptive activity in the

⁷⁸ Brueggemann, *Israel’s Praise*, 10.

⁷⁹ See Brueggemann, *Abiding Astonishment*, 21.

past. We live in a time of great speculation concerning the future. We want to know things that have not been revealed to us and we search for answers and speculate in response. How much better would it be to affirm what God has done in the past and that God's redemptive nature remains constant. Our active remembrance of God's redemptive activity may enable us to wait for the uncertain future and familiarity with the stories of God's activity may allow us to discern with clarity those expectations which are consonant with God's nature as revealed in history and in Jesus Christ from those which are not.

Not only may we discern more clearly what our expectations for the future may be, we may participate in shaping that future through the retelling and re-living of the past. Brueggemann's world making concept that remembering and retelling the events of the past may lead us to yearn for and work towards a specific future is not one entirely alien to Christian thinking. The disciples and gospel writers certainly had in mind that Christians should remember Christ in a particular way and that this remembrance could elicit belief. Christ himself instituted the Lord's Supper with the command to "remember me," and Christians have been actively using this sacramental ritual ever since to experience the presence of the living Lord and to gain strength for the journey ahead. Christ did not leave his disciples without a mission however, and the expectations for their role in creating a new world were clear. We are to look forward to and actively participate in bringing about the day at which "every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the father." (Philippians 2:10-11) This world creation in which Christians are to participate is not the creation of any world at their whim, but the creation of a world which reflects the character of God as revealed in Scripture. Through the creatively re-telling the stories of God's activity in the past, Christians may learn to view their world through the lens of these stories and to behave in ways that participate in the creative nature of God to bring about a future which more fully reflects God's character as revealed in Jesus Christ.

MAKING A POST-MODERN WORLD IN WORSHIP

We began this study in the hope that a bridge might be built between the world of Christian worship and the post-modern world we now inhabit through the proposal of a use for narrative texts in the context of Christian worship. Our discussion has tended towards the content of the hymns in question rather than specific comments upon their style, although we noted in places where Wesley in particular made his texts singable within the musical style of his day. We have seen that the use of narrative in Christian worship can have powerful effects, communicating the relevance of the God of the Bible to current events, shaping and forming a worldview and creating a hope for the future. The struggle of the church in the post-modern era has often been defined by the challenge of creating authority for the church. The post-modern is not willing to accept doctrines and dogmas simply because she is told they are empirically true, nor is the authority of the church any guarantor of the truth of doctrines in her mind.⁸⁰ Because of this typical skepticism, worship which is primarily communicated through the great doctrinal hymns of the church is less relevant. It does little good to continue to sing great creedal statements no matter how true if the worshipper refuses to accept them because of their garb of creedalism. The narrative approach we have described, however, allows for connection between experience and belief. The worshipper is pulled into the story and allowed to experience the nature of God and to arrive at the same affirmation that God is mighty and powerful based on seeing God's triumph over the Egyptians as the worshipper of an earlier era might have arrived at by singing the claim that "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." The worshipper can experience her own pain and struggles as redemptive by expressing those struggles through the eyes of those redeemed by God in the narratives of the Bible. The worshipper can have her world view shaped by the narratives as the hopes and

⁸⁰ See Rob Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening: Singing a New Song in the Post-Modern Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 146 for more on post-modern skepticism.

longings of her heart are expressed in the hope and promise of a God who behaved in redemptive and reconciling ways in the past and remains unchanged.

We can, in Brueggemann's terms, 'make' a post-modern world. We can allow the experiences of the people of God to be the shared experiences by which people view their lives and in light of which they shape their futures. The church has been entrusted with the stories of God's redemptive activity for the benefit of the whole world. It is our responsibility to share these stories in such a way that the post-modern sees herself in the story, recognizes her own redemption and goes out to redeem her world in the name of the God who redeemed her.

Bibliography

- Anderson, A. A. The Book of Psalms V. 2 Psalms 73-100. London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1972.
- Brueggemann, Walter. Abiding Astonishment: Psalms, Modernity and the Making of History. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991.
- Brueggemann, Walter. Israel's Praise: Doxology against Idolatry and Ideology. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988.
- Clifford, Richard J. "In Zion and David a New Beginning: An Interpretation of Psalm 78." in Traditions in Transformation. ed. Baruch Halpern and Jon D. Levenson. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1981.
- Cross, Frank M. Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973.
- Durham, John I. Exodus. Word Biblical Commentary Series, no. 3. Waco, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1987.
- Fretheim, Terrence E. Exodus. Interpretation. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991.
- Goulder, M. D. The Psalms of Asaph and the Pentateuch. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996.
- Hays, Richard B. Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.
- Hildebrandt, Franz and Oliver A. Beckerlegge. The Works of John Wesley: A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists. vol. 7. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983.
- Kraus, Hans-Joachim. Psalms 60-150. trans. Hilton C. Oswald. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.
- Kselman, John S. "Psalm 77 and the Book of Exodus." vol. 11 The Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University, n.d.

- Lee, Archie C.C. "The Context and Function of the Plagues Tradition in Psalm 78." *JSOT* 48, 1990.
- Mays, James L. *Psalms. Interpretation.* Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989.
- Miller, Patrick. *Interpreting the Psalms.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986.
- Mitchell, T. Chrichton. *Charles Wesley: Man with the Dancing Heart.* Kansas City: MO, Beacon Hill Press, 1994.
- Redman, Rob. *The Great Worship Awakening: Singing a New Song in the Post-Modern Church.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002.
- Russell, Brian Douglas. "The Song of the Sea: The Date and Theological Significance of Exodus 15:1-21" Ph.D. Diss., Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education, 2002.
- Ruth, Lester. "Christ, baptizer with the Holy Spirit." Lecture to WO515. Asbury Theological Seminary, Orlando, FL. 27 February 2003.
- Schaefer, Konrad. *Psalms.* Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993.
- Schultz, Richard L. *The Search for Quotation: Verbal Parallels in the Prophets.* Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 180. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999.
- Sommer, Benjamin D. *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- Stern, Phillip. "The Eighth Century Dating of Psalm 78 Re-argued." Hebrew Union College Annual 66.01., 2001.
- The United Methodist Hymnal.* Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989.
- Tyson, John R. ed. *Charles Wesley: A Reader.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- van Grol, Harm W. M. "Exegesis of the Exile - Exegesis of Scripture?: Ezra 9:6-9." in *Intertextuality in Ugarit and Israel.* ed. by Johannes C. De Moor. Boston: Brill, 1995.

Webber, Robert. Planning Blended Worship: The Creative Mixture of Old & New.

Nashville: Abingdon, 1998.

Weiser, Artur. The Psalms. trans. Herbert Hartwell. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962.

Wright, Tim and Jan, ed. Contemporary Worship: A Sourcebook for Spirited-Traditional,

Praise and Seeker Services. Nashville: Abingdon, 1997.