

Waltke, Psalms, Session 6, Resources from Notebooklm

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

This lecture by Dr. Bruce Waltke examines various approaches to interpreting the Psalms, focusing on the form-critical approach pioneered by Hermann Gunkel. Waltke critiques the underlying historical-critical assumptions that often accompany form criticism, particularly the skepticism towards biblical authorship. He then explores Gunkel's classification of psalms into types like hymns, laments, and thanksgiving songs, offering his own assessment and modifications to Gunkel's system. The lecture also discusses the importance of understanding the literary context and Sitz im Leben (setting in life) of each Psalm to ensure accurate interpretation. Finally, Waltke analyzes the structure and motifs of hymns of praise within the Psalms, emphasizing the theological significance of their calls to praise.

2. 17-minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Waltke's, Psalms, Session 6 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Psalms → Waltke).



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3. Briefing Document: Dr. Bruce Waltke on Psalms - Lecture 6 (Form Critical Approach and Hymn Motifs)

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided excerpts of Dr. Bruce Waltke's lecture on Psalms:

I. Overview & Purpose

- **Methodology:** Dr. Waltke is exploring the Psalms through various interpretive lenses, moving from broad overviews to focused analysis of specific psalms. The goal is to understand the Psalms authentically, as intended by their original authors. This lecture introduces the "form-critical approach."
- **Focus:** The lecture is not primarily theological or spiritual, but rather focuses on understanding the literary and historical contexts to better interpret the Psalms.
- **Progressive Approach:** Waltke first sets the stage by considering historical and literary approaches, then narrows focus to form criticism. This method involves a broad survey of approaches before delving into specific psalms.

II. Key Concepts and Themes

- **Historical Approach:** The Psalms may have originated as a royal hymnbook, with the king representing the people before God. This links to the idea of the earthly temple being a metaphor for the spiritual realm, with the earthly king representing Christ. The Old Testament, therefore, provides a picture book to understand the spiritual truths in the New Testament.
- **Literary Approach** Waltke emphasizes the poetic nature of the Psalms. This approach focuses on parallelism, asking how lines are related and how they differ. Understanding the poet's mind is key to authentic interpretation.
- **Form-Critical Approach:** The lecture's core focus. This approach classifies psalms by their literary genre or form (hymns, laments, etc.). This lecture focuses primarily on hymns. This approach comes out of the historical skepticism of the late 19th century. This skepticism developed due to the idea of using reason above revelation and it dismissed the Bible's claims about its own authorship.
- **Theological Significance of Hymns:** Hymns allow us to hear Israel's direct testimony about God, providing a different form of revelation than prophetic or law-based texts.

- **Academic Skepticism:** Waltke critiques the skepticism towards Davidic authorship of the Psalms and traditional dating. This skepticism stems from literary analysis of the Pentateuch, particularly Wellhausen's documentary hypothesis, which posits that the Pentateuch is made of several source documents, JEDP, each with different authorship and dating, that were later combined into one text. According to Waltke, this is due to a presupposition that reason trumps revelation and a rejection of divine intervention.
- **Gunkel's Contributions:** Hermann Gunkel is the central figure in the development of the form-critical approach. He attempted to identify the original settings in life for the Psalms (*sitz im leben*). He categorizes psalms by common words, moods, ideas, motifs, and other literary criteria (*Gattung*). Gunkel concluded that while the forms may have originated in the first temple period, most extant psalms are from the second temple period. He identified five principal types of psalms: hymns of praise (including royal psalms), individual laments, communal laments, and thanksgiving psalms.
- **Waltke's Critique of Gunkel:** Waltke disagrees with the historical skepticism behind the form-critical approach. He questions the ability to pinpoint the original "*sitz im leben*" beyond authorship. He argues the Royal Psalms are not a distinct "form" but a topic. While Gunkel identified five types, Waltke argues these can be reduced to three, matching the three types listed in 1 Chronicles 16:4; petition, thanksgiving, and praise, and that Gunkel's categories need further nuance and need to account for instruction.
- **Importance of Genre:** Recognizing different literary genres in the Psalms helps with exegesis, word studies and understanding if the literature is symbolic or literal. For instance, the word "*peti*" means "open" but has a different connotation in Proverbs (foolishness) than in Psalms (righteousness). Another example is the use of David in Psalm 51 that seems to reject sacrifices. Form-critical analysis shows that this is only during the praise section and therefore a temporary rejection, not a total one.
- **Hymn Structure:** Hymns have three basic components: a call to praise, the main body (cause for praise), and a renewed call to praise. Waltke will explore each of these in more detail.
- **Two Types of Praise** There are two types of praise: praise for who God is and what he has done generally and thanksgiving praise for how God specifically answered prayer.

III. Key Quotes

- "The Old Testament is a metaphor of the New. It's concrete, physical. So, the earthly temple is a picture of the spiritual temple." This emphasizes the typological connection between the testaments.
- "What we're trying to do is enter back into the mind of the poet. How is he thinking? So, we can be authentic in our interpretation." This explains the purpose behind the literary approach.
- "So, their words to God, a praise becomes God's word to us and through their lips, not now through the lips of Moses or through the lips of a prophet, but now through the king and his people, we are being taught about God." This explains why the psalms are significant.
- "So, what has happened is the whole Bible is turned on its head. So, what we thought was early by Moses is now late." This summarizes the impact of the Wellhausen hypothesis.
- "I think the documentary hypothesis is extremely plausible." This demonstrates that Waltke acknowledges the academic arguments.
- "But there are a lot of things I don't have an answer to. And if I have to depend upon it, I have to have an answer to everything. Then the only conclusion I can draw is I have to be agnostic." This highlights Waltke's approach to faith and intellectual honesty.
- "From about 1870, the time of Wellhausen to Gunkel, say 1920, all academic literature was based upon a Wellhausen view of source documents and that sort of a thing." This establishes the influence of Wellhausen.
- "It's out of that background that we get a man like Gunkel. He's been trained through the Wellhausian approach." This explains the context of Gunkel's work.
- "What is the setting in life where this psalm originated?" This question represents the form critical approach's emphasis on the "sitz im leben."
- "The form of criticism is asking, where does it originate? And where is it disseminated? Where was the tradition passed down?" This describes the difference between the historical approach and the form critical approach.

- “The big change came with the German scholar, Gunkel, that he was the great champion of form criticism. He scientifically refined form criticism.” This emphasizes Gunkel's role in form criticism.
- “I think conservatives have made a big mistake. They've equated the book of Deuteronomy with the Book of the Law. I myself have drawn the conclusion that the book of Deuteronomy was written during the exile.” This presents a sophisticated view of the authorship and dating of Deuteronomy.
- “And he had distinguished, and I think basically look at Gunkel's five types, you can pretty much boil them down to those three types where you have hymns of praise.” This presents Waltke's own contribution to Gunkel's form criticism.
- “This is the recognition formula that you did not recognize who I am.” This describes a formula used to describe God's self-disclosure.
- “So, it is public praise, public confession. You're telling everybody, you're praising God for what he did for you.” This explains what it means to give thanks in the Old Testament.
- “The sense in which the picture, we mean, the sense in which the picture deserves or demands admiration is this, that admiration is the correct, adequate, or appropriate response to it.” This is Lewis' argument for why God should be praised.

IV. Next Steps

- Waltke will continue to explore the hymn form, examining its motifs (call to praise, cause for praise, renewed call), performance, theology, and minor subtypes like “Songs of Zion.” He will focus specifically on Psalms of praise.
- The lecture will continue to investigate two types of praise psalms: those focused on God generally and those focused on thanking God for specific things.

V. Implications

- This lecture helps listeners understand the historical and literary contexts of the Psalms.
- It provides a critical approach to the form-critical method by highlighting its strengths and limitations.
- It calls into question some modern scholarly assumptions and encourages a deeper engagement with scripture.

- It introduces a framework for recognizing and understanding different types of praise and different purposes for the psalms.

This briefing document should provide a comprehensive overview of Dr. Waltke's lecture excerpt. Let me know if you have any other questions.

4. Psalms Study Guide: Session 6, Form Critical Approach, Hymn Motifs

Psalms Study Guide: Form Criticism and Hymn Motifs

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What is the primary goal of applying different approaches to the Psalms according to the lecture?
2. How does the Old Testament serve as a metaphor for the New Testament, and how is the king an example of this?
3. In poetry, what two questions should you ask about related lines and why is that helpful?
4. What is the form-critical approach, and what does it attempt to do?
5. What are the five main types of psalms identified by Gunkel?
6. What are the presuppositions behind the literary-analytical approach that led to skepticism about the Bible?
7. What was the JEDP theory, and how did Wellhausen use it to date the Pentateuch?
8. Why was the discovery of the Ugaritic texts significant in the context of form criticism of the Psalms?
9. What are the two main methods of the form-critical approach?
10. What are the three main motifs of a hymn of praise, and what do they consist of?

Answer Key

1. The primary goal of applying different approaches to the Psalms is to understand and interpret them authentically, appropriate to the nature of the Psalms themselves and to gain a holistic view. This is not to focus on theology alone, but to understand the meaning of the texts themselves.
2. The Old Testament is a concrete, physical metaphor of the spiritual, such as the earthly temple mirroring the spiritual temple. The earthly king is a picture of the greater king, Christ, at the Father's right hand.

3. You should ask how related lines are both similar and different to understand how the poet is thinking and to enter back into the poet's mind. This allows for a more authentic interpretation of the text.
4. The form-critical approach attempts to classify psalms according to their literary form or genre (e.g., hymns, laments), which allows for understanding their original setting in life (Sitz im Leben) and helps to determine their historical and social context.
5. The five main types of psalms are hymns of praise (including royal psalms), individual laments, communal laments, thanksgiving psalms, and instruction psalms (mentioned later in the lecture).
6. The literary-analytical approach was built on presuppositions that reason is superior to revelation. This results in skepticism towards the Bible's claims of divine intervention and prophecy, which led to a disbelief of traditional authorship.
7. The JEDP theory proposes that the Pentateuch is composed of four distinct documents: J (Yahwistic), E (Elohistic), D (Deuteronomic), and P (Priestly). Wellhausen dated these documents based on literary criteria, concluding J was the earliest and P the latest.
8. The Ugaritic texts, with their ancient poetry, demonstrated that the language and forms of the Psalms were not unique to a later period, but were common in much older ancient Near Eastern texts. This undermined the idea that language and religious development could be used to date them late.
9. The two main methods of the form-critical approach are the identification of the "Sitz im Leben" (setting in life) and the "Gattung" (genre or form) of a psalm. This helps establish where they were used and classify the type of psalm being examined.
10. The three main motifs of a hymn of praise are a call to praise, the main body (or cause for praise), and a renewed call to praise. The call to praise is the opening command, the cause for praise is the heart of the psalm that focuses on God's actions and qualities, and the renewed call to praise reinforces the hymn's purpose and wraps up the section.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Answer each question in a well-organized essay format with detailed examples from the source text.

1. Discuss the impact of the literary-analytical approach and the JEDP theory on traditional views of biblical authorship, particularly concerning the Pentateuch, and how did this approach influence the field of Psalms study?
2. Explain the form-critical approach to the Psalms, including the concepts of "Sitz im Leben" and "Gattung," and how Gunkel used them. In what ways do those analytical methods align or misalign with the traditional method for understanding the Psalms?
3. Analyze the different types of psalms identified in the lecture, focusing on the distinctions between hymns of praise, laments, and thanksgiving psalms, and explain how these classifications help in understanding the diverse functions and purposes of the psalms.
4. Describe the significance of the recognition formula and how it addresses the potential conflicts within the Pentateuch concerning the name of God (Yahweh) and how it relates to the experience of Israel. Why was the conservative response inadequate in Dr. Waltke's view?
5. Explain why, according to the lecture, it is important to study the motifs, performance aspects, and theology of the Psalms. How does a formal, critical analysis enhance or detract from the holistic spiritual understanding of the Psalms?

Glossary of Key Terms

Anachronism: Something that is out of its correct chronological time, often applied to prophetic elements in the Old Testament by critical scholars.

Documentary Hypothesis: The theory that the Pentateuch (first five books of the Bible) was compiled from four originally independent sources, identified as J (Yahwist), E (Elohist), D (Deuteronomist), and P (Priestly).

Form Criticism: A method of biblical criticism that analyzes literary forms or genres to determine their original settings in life (Sitz im Leben) and the purpose of each text.

Gattung: A German term referring to the genre or literary form of a text, especially in the context of form criticism.

Grammatical-Historical Method: A method of biblical interpretation that emphasizes the meaning of words within their historical context, seeking to understand the original intent of the author.

Historical Criticism: A method of biblical criticism that focuses on the historical context of a text, including its authorship, date, and social setting.

Hymn: A type of psalm characterized by general praise of God for his attributes and actions, including creation and history.

JEDP Theory: Another name for the Documentary Hypothesis, referring to the four main sources that critics believe make up the Pentateuch.

Lamnatzeah: A Hebrew word often found in the superscriptions of the Psalms, sometimes translated as "to the director" but also may mean "petition".

Literary Analytical Approach: A method of biblical criticism that analyzes the literary characteristics of texts, often used to identify different source documents.

Motif: A recurring theme, idea, or literary element within a text, such as the call to praise, cause for praise, and renewed call to praise in a hymn.

Parallelism: A literary device in Hebrew poetry where two or more lines of text are related, either by restatement, contrast, or expansion.

Pseudograph: A work falsely attributed to a specific author.

Recognition Formula: A formula found in the Old Testament, particularly in Exodus, that describes an occasion when God reveals or demonstrates a power that he had not previously shown, such as in the plagues in Egypt. The formula includes a phrase like, "You will know that I am Yahweh".

Sitz im Leben: A German term meaning "setting in life," referring to the original social, historical, or cultural context in which a literary text or genre would have been used.

Superscripts: The titles or headings at the beginning of many psalms, often traditionally attributed to David, that give historical and authorial context.

Ugaritic Text: Ancient texts discovered in Ras Shamra (ancient Ugarit) that provide parallels to Hebrew poetry, particularly in terms of language and literary style.

5. Frequently Asked Questions on the Waltke, Psalms, Session 6

1. What is the primary goal of studying the Psalms, according to the lecture?

The main objective is to understand and interpret the Psalms authentically, in a way that is true to their original intent and literary form. This involves utilizing different approaches (historical, literary, form-critical) not just for theological or spiritual insights, but to gain a deeper comprehension of the text itself. The goal is to enter back into the mind of the original poet to gain authentic interpretation.

2. How does the historical approach view the role of the king in the Psalms?

The historical approach views the Psalms, at least originally, as a royal hymnbook associated with the king and the temple, with the people of God gathered in the king. The king represents both the people and himself, and the earthly temple is seen as a metaphor of the spiritual temple. This concept helps to understand Christ at the Father's right hand. In this sense, the Old Testament is seen as a "picture book" to better understand the spiritual reality.

3. What is the form-critical approach to the Psalms, and how does it differ from other approaches?

The form-critical approach categorizes Psalms based on their literary form or "genre" (Gattung), such as hymns, laments, or songs of trust, and seeks the original "setting in life" (Sitz im Leben) where these psalms were used. This differs from historical and literary approaches as it focuses on the context and purpose of each psalm rather than simply assuming Davidic authorship or analyzing parallelism. It attempts to understand the historical and social circumstances that led to the creation of the Psalms.

4. What is the documentary hypothesis (JEDP theory), and how has it impacted the study of the Old Testament?

The documentary hypothesis, proposed by Julius Wellhausen, suggests the Pentateuch (first five books of the Bible) is composed of four distinct sources: the Jahwist (J), Elohist (E), Deuteronomist (D), and Priestly (P) sources. Each had distinct perspectives, literary styles, and vocabulary. This theory, and other views arising from it, led many academics to question the traditional authorship and dating of the Old Testament, particularly doubting Mosaic authorship, leading to a generally skeptical attitude toward the Bible's own claims to authorship and historical claims.

5. What are the main types of Psalms identified by the form-critical approach?

According to Gunkel, there are five primary types: Hymns of praise (including royal psalms), individual laments, communal laments, Thanksgiving Psalms, and what the lecture later includes: instruction psalms, and songs of Zion. Hymns focus on God's character and actions, while laments express sorrow, and Thanksgiving psalms acknowledge God's specific answers to prayer. Each type is associated with particular moods, vocabulary, and motifs, which are used to analyze the texts.

6. What is meant by the "recognition formula" in the context of Exodus 6 and God's name, "Yahweh?"

The recognition formula is the phrase "you will know that I am Yahweh" that appears in Exodus 6. The lecturer suggests that this formula points to an understanding that the Israelites did not truly know or experience the full power and character of God, even though they knew the name Yahweh. This understanding of "knowing" is gained through witnessing His acts of deliverance and power such as through the plagues. So this is a formula about recognition and experience.

7. What are the main elements or motifs of a hymn of praise, and how are they structured?

A hymn of praise typically has three main elements: a call to praise (an invitation to worship God), the cause for praise (reasons for worshipping Him, usually God's actions in creation or history), and a renewed call to praise or conclusion (a return to the call to praise and further acknowledgement of God). These elements provide a structural framework to understand and appreciate the theology of the Psalms.

8. Why does the lecture describe the call to praise in the Psalms as an "imperative mood," and what is its significance?

The imperative mood highlights that the call to praise is not an optional suggestion but a divine command. This command is further understood with a discussion of C.S. Lewis' view that praise is not for God's benefit, but because it is the right, appropriate response and a good thing for the one offering the praise. It acknowledges that God is worthy of worship, and to not praise him is to miss out on a vital aspect of life. It is not to be lukewarm but enthusiastic and fervent. This highlights the importance of actively engaging in worship and acknowledging God's greatness in all circumstances.