

# **Waltke, Psalms, Session 19, Resources from Notebooklm**

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

## **1. Abstract of Waltke, Psalms, Session 19, Liturgical Approach, Cultus/Ritual, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL**

This lecture by Dr. Bruce Waltke explores the liturgical approach to interpreting the Psalms, focusing on the "cultus" or ritual aspects of their composition and use. He contrasts various scholarly interpretations, including those of Gunkel and Mowinckel, who posited an annual enthronement festival as the central context for many Psalms. Waltke also examines the symbolic, typical, sacramental, and propagandistic functions of the Psalms within temple worship, arguing for a nuanced understanding that considers both their historical settings and their enduring spiritual significance. He emphasizes the importance of considering the superscriptions and the psalms' place within the broader context of Israelite religious practice. The lecture ultimately advocates for a balanced approach, integrating historical and spiritual interpretations.

**2. 16-minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Waltke's, Psalms, Session 19 – 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

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and ideas from the provided lecture excerpt by Dr. Bruce Waltke on the Psalms, focusing on the liturgical approach:

#### **Briefing Document: Dr. Bruce Waltke on Liturgical Approach to the Psalms**

**Source:** Excerpts from "Waltke\_Psalms\_EN\_Lecture19.pdf"

**Date:** (Assumed to be 2024, per document)

#### **Introduction**

This lecture by Dr. Bruce Waltke delves into the liturgical (or "cultic") approach to interpreting the Psalms. It builds upon previous lectures that covered hermeneutics, historical context, poetic structure, and form criticism (genres) of the Psalms. Waltke emphasizes that while the Psalms can be approached from various perspectives, a liturgical approach offers a unique and valuable understanding by focusing on the Psalms' role within communal worship.

#### **Key Themes and Concepts:**

##### **1. Review of Previous Approaches:**

- Waltke begins by reviewing prior methods of interpreting the Psalms, noting the importance of spiritual understanding, historical context, and recognizing the author as both human and divinely inspired.
- He stresses that the approach must acknowledge God as the ultimate author, necessitating a spiritual, rather than just a scientific, approach.
- He identifies the Psalms as a royal hymnbook, heavily influenced by the experiences of the king (David), with implications for understanding Christ as the ultimate King.
- He reviews the different Psalm genres explored thus far, including hymns, songs of grateful praise, and laments (individual and communal), noting the transition from lament to confidence.

##### **1. The Liturgical Approach (Cultus/Ritual):**

- **Definition:** The liturgical approach focuses on the *external expression* of religion, specifically how the Psalms functioned within the context of communal worship

(the "cultus"). It moves beyond the purely inward or spiritual experience. It's concerned with regulated forms over spontaneity.

- **Cultus vs. "Cult":** Waltke clarifies that "cultus," in an academic sense, refers to the structured, external practices of religion, not the pejorative sense of a small, fringe religious group.
- **Key Aspects:** The lecture will explore aspects like sacred sites, calendars, personnel, actions, and objects.
- **Thinkers:** Waltke references Sigmund Mowinckel and Eichrodt as key figures in the study of the cultic approach to Psalms. Mowinckel emphasizes the "socially established and regulated holy acts and words" for encounter with God, and Eichrodt sees it as "concrete external actions" performed by appointed individuals in set forms.
- **Form Criticism:** Waltke positions the liturgical approach as a derivative of form criticism, shifting focus from the form and mood to the setting in life.
- **Structured Experience:** Quoting Kurt Goldhammer, Waltke highlights that cultus is a "structured experience, symbolic, meaningful activity" and a "pattern of facts, that have a reasonable connection with each other".

## 1. The Psalter and Communal Worship

- **The Psalms and Group Identity:** Waltke explains how the Psalms allowed individuals to "become one with his group and shared the spirit which moved it," providing a shared experience of contrition, trust, or thanksgiving.
- **The Importance of Covenant:** Waltke argues against a Hegelian interpretation where the finite merges into the infinite. Rather, he asserts worship is through covenant structures requiring confession of sin and mediated through Christ. The book of Psalms is entered into through keeping God's law.
- **Origin of Psalms:** While many Psalms were written in private settings (David's wilderness experiences, exile, etc.) they eventually were collected and used within the temple. Therefore, the temple is a principal site for understanding the Psalms.

## 1. Historical-Critical Perspectives on Cultus:

- **Gunkel:** While recognizing the role of the temple, Gunkel posited that the Psalter originated *after* the exile, imitating earlier forms, and were primarily prayers for

the synagogue rather than the temple. He rejected the superscripts, thinking them worthless.

- Gunkel believed that Psalter was democratized because there was no king or priest anymore during the exilic/post-exilic period. Therefore, imagery, like the king and his battles, was an illustration for the problems of the common people suffering from illness, which Gunkel suggests is at times psychotic.
- According to Waltke, this is a complete reversal of the plain sense of the Psalter.
- **Mowinckel:** As Gunkel's student, Mowinckel placed the Psalms within the temple worship of the pre-exilic period and reconstructed an *annual enthronement festival* based on his understanding of ancient near eastern religions, not Moses' law.
- He believed that the phrase, "Yahweh reigns" means "Yahweh has become king" and was celebrated yearly through the re-enactment of creation and the Exodus from Egypt, crushing any enemy. This, he believes, set the world aright.
- He believed that this ritual has sacramental effects, and the holy word itself is creative.
- He sees the entire Psalter as belonging to this ritual.
- **Enthronement Psalms (93-99):** These psalms celebrate God's reign, which Mowinckel interpreted as a yearly enthronement ritual, influenced by pagan practices of gods like Marduk and Baal.

#### 1. Waltke's Evaluation of the Cultic Approach:

- **Positive Points:**
- The fall festival may have become the primary festival during the monarchy. This idea is backed up by 1 Kings 8:2 that the temple was dedicated during this time and that Jeroboam instituted a similar festival in the north. Also, 2 Kings 23:22 suggests that during Josiah's reforms the Passover was eclipsed.
- The phrase "Yahweh reigns" *could* be interpreted as "Yahweh has become king".
- Understanding the imagery from the *chaoskampf* motif can illuminate certain psalms (like Psalm 93).
- **Negative Points:** Reliance on pagan religions, rather than Mosaic law, to reconstruct the festival introduces heterodoxy into biblical interpretation.

- All festival reconstructions are hypothetical and lack clear scriptural warrant.
- There is too much variety of views, calling the entire method into question.
- Waltke argues that it is better to accept the superscripts and accept the plain meaning of the text.

#### 1. **Function of the Cultus:**

- **Symbolism:** Visible forms that portray the living stuff of religion. For example, rising smoke symbolized prayers rising to God.
- **Typology:** The external actions are types of inner realities.
- **Sacramental:** The actions have a real effect on the worshipper.
- **Artistic Propaganda:** Based on truth, the Psalms advocate a specific understanding of God and his relationship with Israel.

#### 1. **Example: Psalm 73:**

- Waltke uses Psalm 73 as an example of how a crisis of faith is resolved within the sanctuary. The Psalmist begins with faith in God's goodness but then questions that faith because of the prosperity of the wicked.
- The Psalmist enters the sanctuary and sees the destiny of the wicked in the light of God's holiness. The imagery in the temple helps resolve the psalmist's crisis.

#### **Quotes:**

- Mowinckel on Cult/Ritual: "...the socially established and regulated holy acts and words in which the encounter and communion of the deity with the congregation is established, developed, and brought to its ultimate goal."
- Eichrodt on Cult: "...the expression of religious experience and concrete external actions performed within the congregation or community, preferably by officially appointed exponents and in set forms."
- Goldhammer on Cult: "structured experience, symbolic, meaningful activity... pattern of facts, that have a reasonable connection with each other in the mind and attitude of the person who stands within it."
- Mowinckel on the Power of the Word: "The Holy Word is effective and creative."
- Mowinckel on the Importance of Cultus for understanding the Psalms: "...we shall have understood neither the Psalms nor its place in actual life, its cultus situation

and its aim until we have connected it with the festival in question and with its ideas and cultic forms."

- Waltke on the connection between faith and experience: "Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart."
- Waltke quoting Psalm 73, showing how it fits into temple worship: "When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply till I entered the sanctuary of God. Then I understood their final destiny."

### **Conclusion:**

Dr. Waltke's lecture provides an overview of the liturgical approach to the Psalms, emphasizing its importance for understanding the Psalms within their original setting of communal worship. While acknowledging the contribution of scholars like Gunkel and Mowinckel, Waltke ultimately advocates for a more textually-grounded approach that honors the superscripts and the plain sense of the Psalter, recognizing the value of the liturgical approach in illuminating the symbolism, typology, sacramental effects, and artistic intent of the Psalms. He recognizes the value of the mythic *chaoskampf* in understanding certain psalms like Psalm 93.

### 3. Psalms Study Guide: Session 18, Psalms of Trust, Psalm 139, Psalm 91

#### Psalms: A Liturgical Approach Study Guide

#### Quiz

**Instructions:** Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. According to Waltke, what is the fundamental approach required for interpreting the Psalms and why?
2. What is the "royal interpretation" of the Psalms, and how does it relate to Christian faith?
3. Briefly describe the three categories of Psalms that Waltke has addressed before reaching the liturgical approach.
4. Explain the difference between lament and complaint, as discussed in the lecture.
5. How does Waltke define the term "cult" in the context of academic literature?
6. What is the significance of the "setting in life" (sitz im leben) when analyzing the Psalms from a liturgical perspective?
7. What is the central claim of the Wellhausen hypothesis, and how does it affect the interpretation of the Psalms?
8. How did Gunkel's and Mowinckel's views on the origin and function of the Psalms differ?
9. Explain the concept of the "chaos kampf" and its relation to the "enthronement Psalms."
10. According to Waltke, what are four functions of the Psalms in liturgical worship?

#### Answer Key

1. The fundamental approach to interpreting the Psalms is a spiritual one because the ultimate author is God, and we encounter Him through faith, hope, and love, not scientific methods. We must also have sympathy with the human author and share in their faith and historical context.
2. The "royal interpretation" recognizes that the Psalms are songs of a king, reflecting the experiences of both suffering and triumph, and that this royal

element permeates the entire book. This relates to Christian faith because these psalms indirectly speak of Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

3. The three categories of Psalms are hymns (songs of praise to God), songs of grateful praise (for specific answered prayers), and lament psalms (expressions of crisis and need addressed to God).
4. Lament is an expression of suffering, which can be either deserved or undeserved. Complaint arises when suffering is undeserved and questions where God is in the midst of it.
5. In academic literature, "cult" refers to the external expression of religion, involving socially established and regulated holy acts and words that establish a relationship between God and the worshiper.
6. Understanding the "setting in life" is crucial because it provides the historical, social, and cultural context for the Psalms. This includes where they were written, why they were written, and how they were likely used in worship and ritual.
7. The Wellhausen hypothesis claims that much of the Old Testament, including the Pentateuch, was not written by Moses but was a later forgery by priests, thus denying the Mosaic regulation. This view undermines the historical reliability of the text as a whole.
8. Gunkel saw the Psalms as originating in the post-exilic synagogue, based on the forms from the temple. Mowinckel believed they came from temple worship, specifically from the pre-exilic period, particularly in connection to an enthronement festival.
9. The "chaos kampf" is a battle between a creating God and the gods of chaos or death found in ancient Near Eastern myths. It provides imagery for the enthronement psalms that present Yahweh's triumph over chaos as a basis for his kingship.
10. The four functions of the Psalms are symbolic (concrete expression of religion), typical (representative patterns of religious life), sacramental (means of experiencing God's presence), and artistic propaganda (advocating truth).

## **Essay Questions**

**Instructions:** Answer the following questions in well-developed essays.



1. Compare and contrast the historical critical method and the liturgical approach to interpreting the Psalms, using examples from the text to illustrate your points.
2. Analyze the significance of the temple in the Psalms according to the liturgical approach, discussing the various ways the temple functions as a site of worship, symbolism, and divine encounter.
3. Evaluate the arguments for and against Mowinckel's enthronement festival theory, referencing both the historical context of the theory and the criticisms that have been leveled against it.
4. Discuss the importance of understanding the symbolism within the Psalms for interpreting the emotions, themes, and theological messages of the text.
5. How does the liturgical approach change the way you understand the relationship between the individual and the community in the context of the Psalms?

## **Glossary of Key Terms**

**Cultus:** The external expression of religion, encompassing the socially established and regulated acts and words in which the relationship between the deity and the worshiper is formed.

**Form Criticism:** A method of analyzing literary texts by classifying them into distinct genres based on their form and function.

**Gattung/Genre/Form:** Terms (German, French, English) that refer to distinct categories or types of literary compositions (e.g., hymn, lament, thanksgiving).

**Historical Approach:** The method of interpreting the Psalms by considering the historical background of the author and the events they experienced.

**Hermeneutics:** The theory and practice of interpretation, especially of biblical texts.

**Lament:** An expression of suffering directed towards God.

**Complaint:** An expression of suffering in which the author questions God's justice or actions.

**Liturgical Approach:** An approach to interpreting the Psalms by examining their role and function within the worship context.

**Royal Interpretation:** The understanding that the Psalms are songs of a king, reflecting experiences of both suffering and triumph, and indirectly refer to Christ.

**Sitz im Leben:** German for "setting in life," referring to the historical and social context in which a literary work was created and used.

**Superscript:** The prose section placed above a psalm, often attributing authorship or providing historical context.

**Symbolic:** The use of concrete forms to represent abstract spiritual realities.

**Typical:** Serving as a pattern or representation of a religious experience or concept.

**Sacramental:** A means by which divine grace or presence is experienced through ritual actions.

**Enthronement Psalms:** Psalms (e.g., 93, 96-99) that celebrate Yahweh's kingship and dominion over the world.

**Chaos Kampf:** A battle between a creating god and the forces of chaos, often seen in ancient Near Eastern mythology.

**Wellhausen Hypothesis:** The theory that the Pentateuch was not written by Moses but is a later priestly forgery from the exilic or post-exilic period.

## 5. FAQ on Themes from Dr. Bruce Waltke's Psalms, Session 19, Liturgical Approach, Cultus/Ritual

Okay, here's an 8-question FAQ based on the provided source, formatted using markdown:

### FAQ on the Psalms and Liturgical Approach

- **What is the primary aim when interpreting the Psalms, and what methods are used to achieve this?**
- The primary aim is to enter into the mind of the inspired psalmist, primarily David, while acknowledging that ultimately, the author is God. This involves using a spiritual approach grounded in faith, hope, and love, a sympathetic understanding of the human author within the context of Israel's covenants, and a scientific approach to the text itself. These methods include historical context, literary analysis, and form criticism.
- **How does the "royal interpretation" impact our understanding of the Psalms?**
- The "royal interpretation" emphasizes that the Psalms are essentially the songs of a king, reflecting both his sufferings and triumphs. This royal element permeates the entire book, not just the explicitly royal psalms. This is important for Christian faith, as the Psalms indirectly point to Christ, the King of kings.
- **What is form criticism and how does it relate to understanding the different types of Psalms?**

Form criticism involves grouping Psalms into distinct genres based on their form, mood, vocabulary, and motifs. This includes understanding the historical background in which each genre originated. The main genres include hymns (general praise of God), songs of grateful praise (specific praise for answered prayers), and lament psalms (expressions of crisis and need).

- **What is the liturgical or "cultic" approach to the Psalms, and how does it differ from other methods?**

The liturgical or cultic approach focuses on the external expression of religion, such as rituals and communal worship. It views the Psalms not just as individual expressions of faith but as part of larger, structured worship practices. While form criticism looks at setting in life, the liturgical approach delves deeper into the "setting" of the Psalm,

considering the place (often the temple), the time (often festivals), and the rituals associated with these Psalms.

- **What does the term "cult" mean in the context of the Psalms, and what are some of its key elements?**

In an academic context, "cult" or "cultus" refers to the external, socially established expressions of religion, including regulated acts and words that establish a connection between the deity and the congregation. Key elements include sacred sites (e.g., temples), sacred times (e.g., festivals), appointed personnel (e.g., priests), sacred actions (e.g., sacrifices), and sacred objects (e.g., the Ark of the Covenant).

- **How did historical critics like Gunkel and Mowinckel view the origin and purpose of the Psalms, and what is the modern scholarly response to their views?**
- Gunkel believed that while the forms of the Psalms originated in the first temple, the Psalter itself was a post-exilic creation written by individuals for synagogue use, imitating the forms of the temple. Mowinckel, Gunkel's student, reconstructed an annual enthronement festival in which Yahweh was proclaimed king with the Psalms playing a key role in the rituals. He believed most of the Psalter is connected to this festival. Modern scholarship acknowledges the enthronement psalms, but largely rejects Mowinckel's extensive reconstruction of the festival and his claim about its central importance.
- **How do the Psalms function symbolically and practically in worship?** The Psalms function in worship in several ways. They operate symbolically, providing concrete, visible forms for internal spiritual experiences. They can function typically, portraying the living reality of religion. They can function sacramentally, as acts through which spiritual realities are made available. Finally, they can function artistically as propaganda, advocating for the truth and viewpoints that the author is trying to highlight.
- **How does the Psalm 73 illustrate the use of the liturgical approach to understand the Psalm?** Psalm 73 is described as a wisdom psalm. It presents a psalmist who was initially confused by the prosperity of the wicked. He says that he was in deep doubt until he entered into the sanctuary of God. There, he realized that his confusion was not true, that he has been mistaken, and that the wicked will face judgement. By entering the temple, where the symbolic elements such as the ark of the covenant were found, he regained his faith. The sanctuary resolved his questions through this act of worship and participation in the cultus.