

Psalms 1-2, 8, 19-33, 40, 46

Come Follow Me

Introduction

What are the Psalms?

[Sigmund Mowinckel](#)

(1884-1965), a Norwegian Biblical scholar, gave this answer:

What are they (the Psalms) essentially? Neither the Greek word *psalmos* ψαλμὸς nor its Hebrew equivalent *mizmör* מִזְמֹר necessarily means a cultic song only, but they are mostly used in this sense. And by the word ‘psalm’ we nowadays as a rule mean, in contrast to other spiritual **songs**, not a religious poem generally, but **one which is connected with the worship of the congregation. In any case it means a poem which arises from, or is related to, that experience which is expressed in worship**, a worship which expresses the ideas and sentiments of the worshippers and their common attitude to the Godhead; such a poem therefore makes a more or less marked use of language which has already been shaped by worship.

Closer investigation has proved that in all religions, Christianity included, religious poetry has originated in connexion with congregational worship, and has been subordinated to it. Then the question arises: was this also the case in the Israelitic-Jewish religion, and does it thus apply to the poetic pieces collected in the book of Psalms?¹

When Were the Psalms Written?

When were the various psalms composed and to what ends? The dating of individual psalms has long been a region of treacherous scholarly quicksand. **The one safe conclusion is that the writing of psalms was a persistent activity over many centuries. The Davidic authorship enshrined in Jewish and Christian tradition has no credible historical grounding.** It was a regular practice in the Late Biblical period to ascribe new texts to famous figures of the past. Although many psalms include the name David in the superscription supplied by the editors, the meaning of the Hebrew particle *le* that usually prefixes the name is ambiguous. It is conventionally translated as “of,” and in ancient seals and other objects that have been discovered, it does serve as a possessive. But *le* also can mean “for,” “in the manner of,” “suitable to,” and so forth... David was no doubt identified by the editors of the collection as the exemplary psalmist because in his story, as told in 1 and 2 Samuel, he appears as a poet and the player of a stringed instrument, and at the end of the narrative is given the epithet “the sweet singer of Israel.” But the editors themselves ascribed psalms to different poets—Asaph, Ethan the Ezrahite, Heyman the Ezrahite, the Korahites, and others. One cannot categorically exclude the possibility that a couple of these psalms were actually written by David, although it is difficult to gauge the likelihood (and some scholars altogether doubt David’s historicity).

In any case, a few of the psalms might be as early as the Solomonic court, or even the premonarchic period. Many of these poems appear to have been written at some indeterminate point during the four centuries of the First Commonwealth (approximately 996 to 586 B.C.E.). Many others offer evidence in

¹ Sigmund Mowinckel, [The Psalms in Israel’s Worship](#), volume 1, Eerdmans, 2004, p. 1-2.

their themes and language of composition in the period of the Return to Zion (that is, after 457 B.C.E.). One famous instance, Psalm 137, which begins with the words “By Babylon’s streams,” was clearly written when the pain of exile was fresh, not long after the national trauma of 586 B.C.E. **There is no way to date what may be the latest psalms**, and the texts found at Qumran indicate that some sort of psalm writing was still a literary activity in the last two centuries before the Christian era. But the extravagant scholarly hypothesis that many of the psalms were composed in the Hasmonean period in the second century B.C.E. is now generally rejected —among other reasons because the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Bible completed during the third century B.C.E., already has virtually the same contents (with the exception of one additional psalm) as the canonical Hebrew collection passed down to us. **These poems, then, were produced by many different poets over more than half a millennium, probably beginning during or even before the tenth century B.C.E., even though the precise dating of most individual psalms remains elusive.** It seems unlikely that any of the psalms is later than the fifth or fourth century B.C.E. By the late first century C.E., the Book of Psalms was considered such a cornerstone of the scriptural canon that in Luke 24:44 it is mentioned together with the Torah and the Prophets as one of the three primary categories of the sacred writings.²

When Were the Psalms Assembled into a Collection?

The anthology that became the Book of Psalms was put together in the Second Temple period, perhaps in the fifth century B.C.E. but probably no later than the fourth century B.C.E. The decision to assemble the disparate psalms in a book may have been motivated by the redaction of the Torah in the fifth century B.C.E. as a canonical book intended for public reading. We have no precise knowledge about the identity of the editors, though the usual suspects— priestly circles in Jerusalem—seem plausible candidates, because they would have had a particular interest in making the psalms authoritatively available for use in worship.³

The Current Order of the Psalms

The book of Psalms is subdivided into five "Books": I, chapters 1-41 (most of the "Psalms of David" are in this collection); II, 42-72 (containing some psalms of Korah and Asaph); III, 73-89 (almost exclusively the psalms of Korah and Asaph); IV, 90-106 (mostly untitled psalms); V, 107-150 (mostly liturgical psalms for pilgrimages to the Temple and for festivals). The division into books is marked by the insertion of doxologies, short hymnic praises of God, at the end of each book. The doxologies to Books I-IV all begin with the words "Blessed is the LORD." The last psalm, Ps. 150, serves as the concluding doxology for Book V and for the book of Psalms as a whole (just as Psalm 1 may be viewed as an introduction to the entire book). The division into five books of psalms is designed to parallel the five books of the Torah. As the Rabbis put it: "Moses gave the five books of the Torah to Israel and David gave the five books of Psalms to Israel" (Midrash Shober Tov, 1.2). This arrangement into five books is artificial and relatively late, and reflects the development from Psalms as a liturgical collection to a Torah-like book to be studied. Strong evidence for the existence of separate collections is: (1) the end of one collection, Ps. 72.20, is clearly marked by the words "End of the prayers of David son of Jesse"; and (2) some psalms were included in two different collections, as is seen by the fact that Pss. 14 and 53 are nearly identical, as are Ps. 18 and 2 Sam. ch 22; Ps. 70 is comprised of Ps. 40.14-18. The first three books seem to have

² Robert Alter, [The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary, Volume 3: The Writings](#), W. W. Norton & Co., 2019, p. 5-6.

³ Alter, p. 8.

been in place before the last two were added, judging from the fact that 28 out of 33 untitled psalms are found in Books IV and V, and that the differences between the Dead Sea Psalms text and the Masoretic Text occur mostly in Books IV and V. Within the present collections are smaller collections, for example, the Songs of Ascents (the ascent of pilgrims to the Temple Mount; Pss. 120-134), so named from their opening words. Modern scholars speak of the Elohistic psalter, Pss. 42-83, in which God is typically referred to as Elohim rather than as LoRD (YHvH) . Some scholars see clusters of psalms that begin or end with "hallelujah" as subcollections (Pss. 105-106; 111-113; 115-117; 146-150). Other collections have been isolated as well. It remains unclear, however, if the psalms within each collection, and the collections themselves, were arranged according to any overarching principle. It is clear, though, that Psalms, even at 150 chapters, is not the single definitive collection of ancient Israel's psalms, since similar poems are also found outside of the Psalter (e.g., 1 Sam. 2. 1-10; 2 Sam. 23. 1-7; Jonah ch 3; Hab. ch 3).⁴

What is the Purpose of the Psalms?

Most psalms fall into three general categories (sometimes a psalm partakes of more than one category): hymns of praise; complaints or pleas for help (sometimes called laments); and thanksgiving psalms. Other subcategories, like wisdom psalms (see Ps. 1), royal psalms (see Ps. 2), or Zion psalms, have also been discerned. Several do not address God at all, and can only with great difficulty be classified as prayers.⁵

Praises to God

The title given to this book by Hebrew tradition reflects a particular view of what was its essential subject. The Hebrew term for "psalm" is *mizmor*, which means "something sung," cognate with the verb *zamer*, "to sing" or "to hymn." It is possible but by no means certain that this verb designates singing accompanied by a musical instrument. It is definitely singing associated with praise or jubilation; one would never use it for the chanting of a dirge. The noun *mizmor*, whether or not attached to the name David, appears in the heading of a large number of the psalms. And yet the book as a whole has never been called *Mizmorim*, "Psalms," but *Tehilim*, "Praises" (a rabbinic plural of the noun *tehilah* that appears in the collection with some frequency in the singular). Now, the two preponderant genres in the book are psalms of thanksgiving, which overlap significantly with psalms of praise, and supplications, but there are more supplications than psalms of thanksgiving or praise. Nevertheless, the idea of calling the book *Tehilim*, "Praises," reflects an insight into what is going on in most though not all of the poems. Again and again, the psalmists tell us that man's ultimate calling is to use the resources of human language to celebrate God's greatness and to express gratitude for His beneficent acts.⁶

A Setting for the Psalms: The Temple

In the beginning of his study of the Psalms, Mowinckel asserts that the setting for the Psalms is the religious activity at the temple in ancient Israel.⁷ He writes, "It is therefore at least a very strongly

⁴ Berlin and Brettler, [The Jewish Study Bible](#), Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 1280-1281.

⁵ [The Jewish Study Bible](#), p. 1283.

⁶ Alter, p. 9.

⁷ Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, pages 1-22. It should be noted that not all scholars agree on this. For example, Robert Alter argued that we must be cautious in our approach with regard to applying the Psalms to the temple. He said, "Many but by no means all the psalms were composed for use in the Temple cult, though it is

founded working hypothesis that the biblical psalms are to be interpreted as cultic texts.”⁸ Baker and Ricks explain, **“The Psalms of our Bible were originally used as the words of this ancient temple ceremony. Book of Mormon and early Christian temple dramas were similar.** Hugh Nibley explained: “Early Christian liturgies reveal a constant concern to reproduce physically something as near as possible to the temple rites of Jerusalem. The bulk of the liturgy is taken up with the Davidic Psalms, the old ritual texts of the temple.”⁹ **Many outstanding Bible scholars of the last century have observed that the festival drama was absolutely central to the religion of the Israelites from at least the time of David and Solomon until 587 B.C.,** when Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and its inhabitants transported to Babylon. After the Jerusalem Temple was demolished by the Babylonians, the full drama was no longer performed by the Jews as part of the Law of Moses ordinances. The surest evidence of its loss is that, as a drama, it does not appear in the sacred Jewish texts, most of which were written or edited during or soon after the Babylonian exile. In earliest times, some adapted version of that same drama had been incorporated into non-Israelite religions throughout the ancient Near East.¹⁰

Hugh Nibley wrote:

The existence of this primordial temple drama has long been recognized. It is vividly set forth in the Memphite Theology, the oldest written record known—whether or not it began in Egypt; and the Shabako Stone makes it clear that the drama was already very old when it was performed to celebrate the dedication of the temple and the founding of the first dynasty of Egypt. It spread from there to Greece, where we have a collection of horrendous tragedies dealing with the subjects of good and evil, and in terms of power and gain. Not only Greece, however, but the rest of the world sooner or later adapted the same standard temple drama. **It should be noted that this drama in its oldest and purest form was not meant to be a spectacle but an instructive demonstration.** The theme is fully developed throughout the ancient world in all its detail, which can’t be treated here, though it should be noted that the purpose of it is a participation of mankind in rites and in seeking the assurance of resurrection.¹¹

The Temple Drama¹²

The Feast of Tabernacles,¹³ or the Ancient Temple Drama was an experience that helped groups of Israelites to experience what it was like for prophets to be called of God to do his work. The

worth noting that the elaborate instructions for the conduct of the cult in Leviticus and elsewhere include all sorts of regulations for the preparation and offering of sacrifices but no mandate for songs or liturgical texts. (The post-exilic Chronicles does represent David appointing levitical singers.) Such songs, however, were part of the rituals celebrated throughout the region, and their attractiveness as an enhancement to the cult, with the words performed by singers to orchestral accompaniment (as many of the psalms indicate) was irresistible. What should be resisted is the inclination of many scholars, beginning in the early twentieth century, to turn as many psalms as possible into the liturgy of conjectured Temple rites—to recover what in biblical studies is called the “life-setting” of the psalms.” Alter, p. 6.

⁸ Mowinckel, p. 22.

⁹ Hugh Nibley, “What is a Temple?” p. 356-357, emphasis added.

¹⁰ LeGrand Baker and Stephen Ricks, *Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord?*, p. 23-24, emphasis added.

¹¹ Hugh Nibley, “Return to the Temple,” *Temple and Cosmos*, Deseret Book, 1992, p. 76-77.

¹² For more on this topic, see: [Overview of the First Israelite Temple Drama](#).

¹³ One scholar explained the Feast of Tabernacles thus, “The members of the so-called Myth and Ritual school, (the author cites S.H. Hooke’s works) going beyond Mowinckel’s views with their own researches, have come to see in Tabernacles the **“enthronement of Yahweh over the physical universe manifest in the bestowal of the seasonal rains and the prosperity of the nation along the lines familiar in the cult drama in the Near East, notably in**

presentation of the prophet before the heavenly council was something that has an extensive background throughout the Ancient Near East. The ancient temple drama was a kind of generic version of the [sod experience](#) that Israelite prophets experienced anciently.¹⁴ This drama, also called the Festival of Yahweh, was held in the autumn at Jerusalem,¹⁵ and was called by the king of Israel.¹⁶ The festival drama was an invitation not just to Israel, but also all nations, as all were considered under the sovereign power and authority of Yahweh.¹⁷ The events celebrated were the sojourning of the children of Israel in the wilderness (Lev. 23:43) and the gathering-in of all the fruits of the year (Ex. 23:16). This ancient Israelite temple drama taught each individual participant that the significance of the [premortals covenants](#) each had made before he came to this earth was as relevant to one's present earthly responsibilities—and to one's ultimate salvation—as the covenants God made with the prophets at when these prophets communed with God in the Divine Council. In other words, **individuals participating in the ancient temple drama were to see their making of covenants as relevant to their salvation and their sphere of influence as the covenants made by the prophets and kings in the drama itself.** Also integral in this festival was the importance of understanding the idea that the king and queen were representatives of God on earth, that there was a need for religious and political order, and that

Mesopotamia and in the Ugaritic texts."(James, *Myth and Ritual in the Ancient Near East*, London, 1958, p. 67) Without attempting to state the principles of the Myth and Ritual theory, we may borrow from one of its exponents a description of the ritual pattern which they find to be common in all Near Eastern cultures. According to W. O. E. Oesterley there are **six elements in this ritual pattern**: "(a) a dramatic representation of the death and resurrection of the god, with whom the king was identified; (b) a recitation or symbolic representation of the myth of creation; (c) a ritual combat, in which the triumph of the god over his enemies was depicted; (d) a sacred marriage; (e) a triumphal procession in which the king played the part of the god; (f) and the importance of the king for the well-being of the community."(Hooke, "The Myth and Ritual Pattern of the Ancient East," *Myth and Ritual*, p. 8). The procession mentioned, it should be added, culminates in an enthronement of the god." George W. MacRae, "[The Meaning of and Evolution of the Feast of Tabernacles](#)," *The Catholic Bible Quarterly*, July 1960, Vol. 22, No. 3, p. 265.

¹⁴ See Jeremiah 23:18, "For who hath stood in the counsel of the Lord, and hath seen and heard his word? Who hath considered his word and heard it?" In the Tanakh, God and the exalted beings of his retinue in his council (TIO, sôd) were known to live and conduct heavenly council meetings in the throne room. This assembly, with God as it's the presiding officer, was called "a divine council" (1 Nephi 1, Psalm 82:1; 89:5–7). God chose prophets and commissioned them personally as he communed with them in his council. When a prophet "stood in the council," they had a direct encounter with God in His throne room. This motif of "standing in the council" is a repeated pattern throughout the Tanakh and apocalyptic visions in extra-biblical literature. As to the ubiquitous nature of this experience, see: Hanson, "Jewish Apocalyptic," p. 31-58; Julian Morgenstern, "The Gates of Righteousness," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 6(1929); Samuel Henry Hooke, *The Origins of Early Semitic Ritual*, London: British Academy, 1938; Frederick James Hollis, "The Sun-Cult and the Temple at Jerusalem, in S.H. Hooke, [Myth and Ritual: Essays on the Myth and Ritual of the Hebrews in Relation to the Cultural Pattern of the Ancient East](#), edited by Samuel Henry Hooke, London: Oxford University Press, 1933; Aubrey R. Johnson, "Hebrew Conception of Kingship," in S.H. Hooke, [Myth, Ritual and Kingship](#), London, Oxford University Press, 1958, 228; Theodore Mullen, *The Assembly of the Gods*, Harvard Semitic Monograph, Chico, California, Scholar's Press, 1980.

¹⁵ J. H. Eaton, [Festal Drama in Deutero-Isaiah](#), Camelot Press, 1979, p.4.

¹⁶ 1 Kings 8.1-6.

¹⁷ From the early days, the festival expressed the subordination of all heavenly beings to Yahweh (Psalm 29) and expected this acknowledged by all nations. The pilgrimage to Zion was therefore imagined as an invitation to all nations to experience the joy of Yahweh and to come into his presence (Psalm 76.11-13; 87.1-6; 96).

through covenant all of Israel could be tied to God and live in peace, living in a state referred to as “prospering in the land.”¹⁸

Psalm 1

1. Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly (Ps. 1.1).
 - a. He is “like a tree planted by the rivers of water” (Ps. 1.3).

Psalm 2: The King is Adopted as a Son of God

“In all of the ceremonies and ordinances of the festival drama, the king represented each person in the audience, as though the play were only about that one person. That would also be true here. Because Psalm 2 represents a similar ordinance where each person in the audience had just been made a sacral king, a more meaningful reading of those last verses would be that the kings addressed were the men in the congregation who were newly created sacral kings.”¹⁹

There were three coronation—or coronation-like—ceremonies performed during the course of the Feast of Tabernacles temple drama.

The first was at the Council in Heaven (Psalm 45) where the king received a blessing from Elohim in which he was given all of the powers and authorities requisite for him to fulfill his earthly assignment.

The second was on earth, when he was a young man and heir apparent, he was anointed to become king, as represented by Psalm 72.

The third coronation of the king—the one that established him as king—was performed, and subsequently reenacted, on the 7th day of the Feast of Tabernacles temple drama, when he was adopted as the son of God (Psalm 2), and sat upon the throne of God in the Holy of Holies—the most sacred of all earthly sacred space. But the legitimacy of that third coronation was based on the presumed reality of the first one which had taken place at the Council in Heaven. Ultimately the king’s earthly authority was established by his foreordination at the Council, and his coronation on the earth was a kind of reaffirmation of that original coronation.²⁰

1. I have set my king upon my holy hill Zion (Ps. 2.6).²¹
2. “Thou art my Son: this day I have begotten thee” (Ps. 2.6).²²

¹⁸ See: Deuteronomy 28.1-14, 29.9, Joshua 1.7-8, 2 Nephi 1.21, 4.4, Jarom 1.9, Omni 1.6, Mosiah 1.7, 2.22, 2.31, 3.9, 10.5, Alma 36.1, 30, 37.13, 38.1, 48.25, 62.51, Helaman 3.20, Ether 10.16. This theme of prospering in the land is directly tied to Israel’s relationship with their heavenly king Yahweh, as well as the connection of the king and queen to their covenantal responsibility to both Yahweh and the people under their reign. It is also noteworthy that this motif is repeated four times in King Benjamin’s speech in Mosiah 1-6, as this speech is given in the setting of the autumn fall festival of Yahweh. For more on this, see: [John A. Tvedtnes, King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles](#).

¹⁹ Baker and Ricks, *Who Shall Ascend Into the Hill of the Lord? The Psalms in Israel’s Temple Worship in the Old Testament and in the Book of Mormon*, Eborn Books, 2010, p. 364.

²⁰ Baker and Ricks, p. 334.

²¹ In making covenants with God, the king is “set” upon the hill of Zion as God’s representative on earth.

²² Psalm 2 marks a high point of the festival drama. It is the conclusion of all that has come before and the beginning of all that comes after. In that psalm, the king’s new name is “son,” denoting that he had been adopted as a son and heir of God. Mowinckel believed that the words, “thou art my son” demonstrated **the cosmic role with which the king of Israel was entrusted. The king’s adoption as a son of Jehovah made him a legal heir, both**

- a. The King is “a son of God” as we read “I will be his father, and he shall be my son” (2 Sam. 7.14).²³
 - b. “I shall give the heathen for thine inheritance... thou shalt dash them to pieces” (Ps. 2.8-9).²⁴
3. “Kiss the Son” נִשְׁקוּ-בֵר (Ps. 2.12).²⁵

Psalm 8: What is man, that thou art mindful of him?

1. Out of the mouths of babes (Ps. 8.2).²⁶

to his earthly throne and to his rightful place in the eternities. This annual re-enactment of the king’s adoption renewed and affirmed the original covenant relationships between Jehovah and the king; between Jehovah and the people; and also between Jehovah, the king, and the people in the recreation of the Kingdom of God. Baker and Ricks, *Who Shall Ascend Into the Hill of the Lord? The Psalms in Israel’s Temple Worship in the Old Testament and in the Book of Mormon*, Eborn Books, 2010, p. 365.

²³ More directly relevant are two passages in which a Hebrew king appears to have been regarded as a son of God. In 2 Samuel 7:14, Yahweh, the God of Israel, speaks to David regarding his heir: ‘I will be his father, and he shall be my son.’ And in Psalm 2:6-7 the psalmist quotes Yahweh: ‘I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill ... You are my son, today I have begotten you.’ Both passages have been used to support the adoptionist view of kingship, whereby the king becomes the son of the deity upon his assumption of the throne. Hoffmeier, “Son of God: From Pharaoh to Israel’s Kings,” *Bible Review* 13, 3 (June 1997), p. 48. See: Baker and Ricks ,p. 365.

²⁴ Sigmund Mowinckel explains:

So the kings have nothing else to do but to ‘be wise’ and submit to Yahweh and his anointed, if they wish to save their lives.

Two things are noticeable in this proclamation. The first is the idea of the **world sovereignty of the king of Zion**. Ideally he has such a claim because he is the anointed one and Yahweh’s governor, and Yahweh is the God of the world. The other point is the basis of the argument for this close relation between Yahweh and the king. He is ‘Yahweh’s son’, adopted by Yahweh ‘.today It is the election, the anointing and the installation which are viewed as an adoption. **Thereby the king is, ideally speaking, world-ruler; and all other kings are his vassals, whose duty it is to pay him homage by ‘kissing his feet’**—the usual sign of homage to the liege sovereign in the East. In Ps. 101 the new king proclaims his ‘charter’ before Yahweh and promises to ‘behave himself wisely in a perfect way’. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship*, Eerdmans, 2004, Volume 1, p. 65.

²⁵ The two Hebrew words *nashqu bar* are the first of a long series of textual cruces in Psalms. As they stand, they make little sense, and the most elaborate efforts have been undertaken—none very convincing—to make the text mean something by extensive reconstructive surgery. The present translation hews to the Masoretic Text, merely revocalizing bar (son? wheat?) as bor, “purity.” The usual sense of the verb *nashqu* is “to kiss,” but it also means “to bear [or wield] arms” (compare its use in Psalm 78:9, 1 Chronicles 12:2, and 2 Chronicles 17:17). As an idiom, to arm oneself with purity is not otherwise attested to in the Bible, but it might make sense here as a counterpoint to the implied raising of arms against Zion at the beginning of the psalm. Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, Volume 3, The Writings, W. W. & Norton, 2019, p. 30.

²⁶ The **meaning of this phrase**, however proverbial it has become, **has not been satisfactorily explained**. One distant possibility: God draws strength from consciously aware humankind, made in His image, even from its weakest and youngest members, against the inhuman forces of chaos. Perhaps the innocence of infants is imagined as a source of strength. Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, p. 38. Perhaps this commentator would be well with this text from the record of the Nephites:

And it came to pass that **he did teach and minister unto the children of the multitude** of whom hath been spoken, and **he did loose their tongues**, and **they did speak unto their fathers great and marvelous things, even greater than he had revealed unto the people**; and he loosed their tongues that they could utter. And it came to pass that after he had ascended into heaven—the second time that he showed himself unto them, and had gone unto the

2. “The works of thy fingers” (Ps. 8.3).²⁷
3. ׀הִלְךָ מִן־הַמַּלְאָכִים וְהַרְבֵּיתָ אֱלֹהִים “Thou hast made him a little lower than the Elohim **angels**” (Ps. 8.5).²⁸
 - a. The LXX reads: ἡλάττωσας αὐτὸν βραχὺ τι παρ’ ἀγγέλους δόξῃ καὶ τιμῇ ἐστεφάνωσας αὐτόν. You have made him lower than the angels in glory, and in honor you have also crowned him. (My translation)
 - b. C.S. Lewis spoke of mankind’s possible potential.²⁹

Psalm 19: The heavens declare the glory of God

1. This psalm emphasizes the rightness of the statutes of the Lord. (see Ps. 19.8-10).

Psalm 20: The Lord saveth his anointed

Father, after having healed all their sick, and their lame, and opened the eyes of their blind and unstopped the ears of the deaf, and even had done all manner of cures among them, and raised a man from the dead, and had shown forth his power unto them, and had ascended unto the Father— Behold, it came to pass on the morrow that the multitude gathered themselves together, and **they both saw and heard these children**; yea, even **babes did open their mouths and utter marvelous things**; and the things which they did utter were forbidden that there should not any man write them. (3 Nephi 26.14-16)

²⁷ God is in the details. He has made the earth “with enough and to spare” (D&C 104.17). See: Mike Day, [“Enough and to Spare,”](#) 2012.

²⁸ Sidney Sperry examines Psalm 8.5: Our real concern is with verse 5, where we are told that man was made “a little lower than the angels.” The Hebrew text does not contain the word angels but reads as follows: “For thou hast made him a little less than the gods [Elohim].” The recent Revised Standard Version translates: “Yet thou hast made him little less than God.” Now the question arises, How did the word angels get into the English text? Various explanations, linguistic and theological, have been suggested, but mine is this: The translation “angels” seems first to have appeared in the Septuagint (Greek) Version of the Psalms, which was completed sometime between 250 and 150 B.C. **Apparently the Septuagint translators couldn’t stomach theologically the bold Hebrew doctrine that man was made a “little less than the gods” and so they proceeded to water it down by substituting “angels” for “gods.”**

The Septuagint rendition was used by the early Christians, as is evident in Hebrews 2:6–9 [Heb. 2:6–9] where the writer made use of it in his discussion of Jesus. And in time the word “angels” passed into Latin versions of Psalm 8:5 [Ps. 8:5] and thence into the King James Version. The King James translators were very partial to the Latin editions of both the Old and New Testaments.

Some authorities have thought that the King James translators, not to mention others, retained the reading “angels” in the interest of monotheism. And still others have suggested in times past that the Hebrew word Elohim includes not only God but the angels as well, hence the use of the latter. We are on safer ground to assume that “gods” or “god” is meant in Psalm 8:5 [Ps. 8:5]. Sidney Sperry, [A Note on Psalm 8.4-5, Feb. Ensign, 1972](#), emphasis added.

²⁹ It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbor. The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbor’s glory should be laid on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken. **It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses**, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship...It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit. C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 39.

1. Psalm 20 fits into the part of the Feast of Tabernacles Temple Drama³⁰ where the King is either preparing for battle³¹ with his enemies or is in the midst of the battle. We see echoes of Psalm 20 in some of the statements of Jesus while on the cross. For example, Luke 23.46 “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit,” and “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15.34). Examples where the king or his people are under threat include when a professional class of priests conspired with chief judges and always against the righteous as they “did enter into a covenant one with another, even into that covenant which was given by them of old, which covenant was given and administered by the devil, to combine against righteousness” (3 Ne. 6.28). The saints may have offered the prayer contained in the plea of Psalm 11.1-7, or even Psalm 14.1-4, or Psalm 64.1-10. These Psalms were prayers for help and deliverance against the enemies of truth.
2. “Now I know that the Lord saveth his anointed” (Ps. 20.6).³²
3. “O Lord, rescue the king!” (Ps. 20.9 Robert Alter translation).³³

Psalm 21: The King is Given the Blessing Requested

1. Psalm 21 was part of one of the concluding ceremonies of the festival drama. One can know that by its words. It was spoken about one who had been dressed in sacred robes; had asked for the blessings of eternal life; and had requested that he be accepted into Jehovah’s presence.³⁴
2. The king is met by God and given a crown of gold (Ps. 21.3). The KJV term “preventest” is an awful translation of the Hebrew.³⁵ This is a veil type-setting, where the king is in the space of being a prophet, clothed in authority in the presence of God.³⁶

³⁰ For a more lengthy discussion of how Psalm 20 fits into this part of the Festival Temple Drama, see Baker and Ricks, pages 607-630. For another overview of the entire temple drama, see: Mike Day, “[Overview of the First Israelite Temple Drama](#),” 2020.

³¹ Berlin and Brettler put this psalm in the context of a king preparing for battle. They also see ties to a non-Israelite poem, most likely to Baal’s kingship. *The Jewish Study Bible*, Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 1304. Ziony Zevit sees a connection in this (and other cries for help in the Psalms) to Egyptian texts: “May Horus the master answer us in our straits; send your messenger from the temple of Arash!” Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches*, London: Continuum, 2001, p. 669.

³² עָנָה יְיָ כִּי הוֹשִׁיעַ יְהוָה מְשִׁיחוֹ יַעֲנֵהוּ מִשָּׁמַי קִדְשׁוֹ Now I know that the Lord saveth his anointed, he will answer him from his holy heaven (Ps. 20.6). The use of עָנָה in this text indicates that God will do more than just hear his anointed, but that he will respond to him when he calls out.

³³ John Eaton understood that the Psalm 20 was used in a ritual setting. He wrote, “Psalm 20 v. 2-6 the Psalmist addresses the king, expressing his people’s blessing-wish for him. He anticipates a ‘day of distress’ (Psalm 18:7, 19) and desires that Yahweh will answer the king’s cry and send help from the holy place... so that the king and his people will experience salvation! In verses 7-9 the psalmist, referring to the king in the third person, expresses confidence that the desired salvation will be given... Gunkel confidently describes the situation of the psalm as on a day of prayer before battle; sacrifices have been offered and the king’s own prayers presented. Mowinckel agrees. J. H. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, SCM Press, 1976, p. 116-117.

³⁴ Baker and Ricks, p. 112.

³⁵ Robert Alter translates it as follows, “For you met him with blessings of bounty, You set on his head a crown of pure gold.” Alter, p. 64. The text reads כִּי־תִקְדָּמְנוּ בְּרִכּוֹת טוֹב תִּשִׁית לְרִאשׁוֹ עֲטֹרַת כָּזָב. Another way to read Ps. 21.3 is “For you have come before him with good blessings and you will set upon his head a crown of gold.” (My translation)

³⁶ The prophet Enoch describes an experience: And it came to pass that I turned and went up on the mount; and as I stood upon the mount, I beheld the heavens open, and I was clothed upon with glory; And I saw the Lord; and he stood before my face, and he talked with me, even as a man talketh one with another, face to face (Moses 7:3-4).

3. The king is clothed, given a promise of invulnerability, and defended (Ps. 21.3-12).
 - a. Honor and majesty have been laid upon the king (Ps. 21.5).
 - b. “He shall not be moved” (Ps. 21.7).
 - c. The king is to destroy the seed of his enemies (Ps. 21.10).³⁷

Psalm 22: The Messiah and His Battle with Evil

1. “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Ps. 22.1)³⁸
 - a. “When every trace of Him seems to have vanished... still obeys.”³⁹
2. “I cry in the daytime... and in the night season” (Ps. 22.2).⁴⁰

³⁷ This is the promise of invulnerability given to the king. Margaret Barker, speaking of these promises, states, “The rituals of the holy of holies were thus taking place outside time and matter, in the realm of the angels and the heavenly throne, and those who functioned in the holy of holies were more than human, being and seeing beyond time.” Margaret Barker, *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy*, T&T Clark, 2003, p. 81. She continues, “The royal rituals in the holy of holies, beyond time, are the setting of the Eucharist, although it is not clear how the various parts of the originals fitted together. Psalm 110 (LXX 109), is obscure (perhaps obscured) in the Hebrew, but **the Greek describes how the king is born as the divine son in the glory of the holy ones**, i.e. in the holy of holies, **and declared to be the Melchizedek priest**. This must have been the original setting for Isaiah 9. 6-7: 'Unto us [the angels] a child is born ... and the government shall be on his shoulder, and his name shall be called ...' ... In the holy of holies, then, a man had been resurrected and enthroned, and was then worshipped by his people as God and King. **That the Davidic monarchs had indeed become 'God and King' in the holy of holies... had not been forgotten**. The holy of holies was the place of the light of Day One, which preceded the light of the visible creation. In the temple this was in fact the darkness of the divine presence in the holy of holies. **Texts which speak of what happened before the world was created, or what happened in eternity, are describing rituals in the holy of holies, presumably the secrets from beyond the curtain**, which Jesus the great high priest is said to have taught (e.g. Clement, *Miscellanies* 6.7; 7.17; Origen, *Celsus* 3.37: 'Jesus beheld these weighty secrets and made them known to a few'; Origen, *On Matthew* 17.2 '... the mystery established before the ages'). Thus Psalm 110 is telling us that the divine son was 'born' and enthroned in eternity. Barker, p. 81-82, emphasis added.

³⁸ These famous words are the ones pronounced by Jesus in his last agony—though in Aramaic, not in the original Hebrew. That moment in Matthew is a kind of peshar, or fulfillment interpretation, of this psalm, because there are other details here (for example, verses 16–19) that could be connected with the crucifixion. Alter, p. 66.

³⁹ Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no more desiring but still intending to do God's will, looks around upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, asks why he has been forsaken and still obeys. C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 39.

⁴⁰ Most Latter-day Saints and other Christians are either unaware that Christ was quoting Psalm 22:1 when he made this well-known statement from the cross (in bold text), or they see it simply as the fulfillment of an isolated prophecy from the Old Testament. When seen from a broader view, this verse introduces all of Psalm 22. The complete text of this psalm follows a pattern found in other psalms known as “Psalms of Lament,” moving from a sufferer’s cries of anguish because of his trials (vv. 1–18), to a request for aid (vv. 19–21), and ending in a note of triumph as the sufferer anticipates the assistance he will receive from God or expresses gratitude that the desired assistance has come (vv. 22–31). Verse one begins the lament with the cry that would later be spoken by Christ. As will be seen, the subsequent verses of Psalm 22 continue to describe the events of Christ’s suffering and crucifixion in stunning detail, providing image after image that the Christ-centered reader recognizes as vividly accurate portrayals of the Atonement, and that would have provided comfort to early Christians as they reflected upon Christ’s statement forever linking his suffering with that chapter. Indeed, as will be seen, the full import of Christ’s quotation will be missed by modern readers if its connection with the rest of Psalm 22 is not understood.

Psalm 22:2 continues the theme that God has not answered the prayer of the supplicant in the way he would have hoped. Although the unanswered “cry in the daytime” and “in the night season” could be read as poetic parallelism indicating a complete sense of forsakenness, **Latter-day Saint readers could also see these time indications as references to Jesus’s dual periods of suffering, in the daytime upon the cross and in the nighttime**

3. “But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men and despised of the people” (Ps. 22:6).⁴¹
4. “All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, *saying*, He trusted on the LORD *that* he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him” (Ps. 22:7-8). Cross reference this with Luke 23:35-37.

at the Garden of Gethsemane. It was in that location where he pled that the “cup pass from [him]” (Matt. 26:39), but the Father in one sense “hear[d] not” (Ps. 22:2), allowing his Son to suffer the full effects of that bitter draught. According to this unique LDS understanding of the atoning nature of Christ’s suffering in Gethsemane, some LDS prophets, as will be seen below, have taught that Christ was left alone to a certain degree, not only on the cross but also in the garden, notwithstanding the fact that he was strengthened for a time by an angel (Luke 22:43).

Interestingly, **Justin Martyr**, a very early Christian commentator writing in the first half of the second century, **also connected the sufferer’s cry in Psalm 22:2 with Jesus’s prayer in Gethsemane** (*Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 97–106). The well-known Christian theologian **Augustine, however**, writing about 250 years later, **completely avoided any mention of Gethsemane in his commentary**, possibly indicating a theological shift in the Christian understanding of the garden experience. Accordingly, modern Christians have generally seen the suffering in Gethsemane as due primarily to a concern for the impending ordeal on the cross, rather than as an atonement for the sins of mankind (Donald A. D. Thorsen, “Gethsemane,” in Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 2:997). **For Latter-day Saints, these verses describe a dual understanding of garden and cross in a way that has been largely missed in Christianity since the times of Justin Martyr.** Shon Hopkin, “[My God, My God, Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me? Psalm 22 and the Mission of Christ](#),” *BYU Studies Quarterly*, 52:4, p. 117, emphasis added.

⁴¹ Hopkin, [My God, My God](#). Hopkin explains: These verses connect textually with the description provided by Isaiah of the Messiah as one “despised (Heb. *nivzeh*) and rejected of men (Heb. ‘*am*)” (Isa. 53:3), both using the same root for “despised . . . of men” (Heb. *b-z-h* . . . ‘*am*). Both passages teach of a suffering Messiah who would not be received by worldly society at large but would remain a rejected outsider. Augustine’s description of the suffering Christ as prophesied in Psalm 22 is particularly moving: “Our Lord was scourged and there was none to help; He was defiled with spittle and there was none to help; He was struck with blows and there was none to help; He was crowned with thorns, there was none to help; He was raised on the tree, there was none to rescue Him.” (Augustine, *St. Augustine on the Psalms*, 1:214.)

That the psalmist described Christ as a “**worm, and no man**” **may have a significant dual meaning.** In one sense, Christ, who “descended below all things” (D&C 88:6; see also Eph. 4:9–10), was considered as less than any other human being, having become in a manner guilty of the darkest sins of all humankind through his atoning sacrifice (2 Cor. 5:21). He was treated as the lowest of creatures, as a “worm,” and was crucified on the cross like the vilest of sinners. Job 25:4–6 demonstrates the connection between sin-induced suffering and the “worm” to which Psalm 22:6 is referring. Job’s friend Bildad uses the word “worm” to suggest that Job’s suffering is due to his sins, a state of uncleanness that is common to all of humankind: “How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman? Behold even . . . the stars are not pure in his sight. How much less man, that is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm (Heb. *tole’ah*)?” Psalm 22:7 follows the same reasoning as that provided by Bildad. Just as Bildad accuses Job of being a sinful worm, providing Job’s suffering as evidence, so Christ—“a worm”—is mocked because his suffering on the cross demonstrates to them his cursed, sinful status.

However, a second possibility remains. Hoskisson has demonstrated the duality of this phrase by indicating that the word “worm” in Hebrew (*tola’at*) is a variant name for the creature (Heb. *tole’ah*) used to provide the color scarlet in the ancient world. Only royalty or the rich could afford the dye from this worm, and scarlet became identified with kingly authority and wealth. The soldiers at Christ’s crucifixion, for example, placed upon him a robe of scarlet (see Matt. 27:28; a purple robe in John 19:2) to mock him as “King of the Jews.” The coloring for this robe would have come from the *tola’at*, thus **teaching that the Messiah is “a worm, and no man,” because he is more than man; he is of kingly heritage, the Son of God.** This view was expressed in Augustine’s commentary on Psalm 22, which stated that Christ is no man, “because He is God.” (Augustine, [St. Augustine on the Psalms](#), 1:213)

5. “The Bulls of Bashan have compassed me” (Ps. 22.12)⁴²
6. “I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels” (Ps. 22.14).⁴³
7. “Dogs have compassed me: The assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet” (Ps. 22.16).⁴⁴
 - a. Elder Holland “He is there to steady and strengthen us.”⁴⁵
 - b. The debate between “like a lion my hands and feet” and “they pierced my hands and feet” קָאָרִי יָדַי וְרַגְלָי.⁴⁶

⁴² This could have a tie to the mythological warfare between the angels that rebelled in Heaven and the General who is Christ, battling against the headquarters of the evil forces “Bashan.” We must remember the Giant Og, the king of Bashan (Deut. 3). Bashan represents the mythological headquarters of the region of hell and the forces of darkness. See Michael Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*, Lexham Press, 2015, p. 121-127 electronic version.

⁴³ Surprisingly, neither Justin or Augustine connected this description with its most obvious fulfillment—the water mingled with blood that flowed from the spear-wound in Jesus’s side (see John 19:34). According to Elder James E. Talmage, this event signaled that Christ had died of a broken heart. (James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981], 668–69, n. 8. For a nuanced medical understanding of Jesus’s death, see W. Reid Litchfield, “[The Search for the Physical Cause of Jesus Christ’s Death](#),” *BYU Studies* 37, no. 4 (1998): 93–109. Litchfield states that the best explanation for Jesus’s death is cardiac arrhythmia, according to him a figurative equivalent to the “broken heart.”) If so, then the psalmist used very appropriate imagery for that experience when he described Christ’s heart like wax melted in heat and his life as being poured out “like water.” Although he did not connect this verse with Christ’s heart, Justin used it to point to Christ’s suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, a connection possibly again indicating an early understanding of Gethsemane that was later lost to the Christian world. “His perspiration poured out like drops of blood as He prayed, . . . His heart was like wax melting in his belly.” (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 103.) Justin also connected the phrase “all my bones are out of joint” (Ps. 22:14) with the challenges of Gethsemane. (Ibid.) **A different but equally appropriate fulfillment, however, was seen by Augustine, who understood this prophecy as being fulfilled in the painful posture of the Crucifixion.** Shon Hopkin, “[My God, My God, Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me? Psalm 22 and the Mission of Christ](#),” *BYU Studies Quarterly*, 52:4, p. 117, emphasis added.

⁴⁴ Robert Alter translates this as “for the curs came all around me, a pack of the evil encircled me...” Alter, p. 68. He explains, “While the Hebrew is the ordinary word for dog, because **dogs were not domesticated in ancient Israel** (though they had long been domesticated elsewhere) and roamed about in packs as scavengers, the biblical term is wholly negative. Hence a pejorative English equivalent seems justified.”

⁴⁵ When we stagger or stumble, **He is there to steady and strengthen us.** In the end He is there to save us, and for all this He gave His life. However dim our days may seem, they have been a lot darker for the Savior of the world. As a reminder of those days, Jesus has chosen, even in a resurrected, otherwise perfected body, to retain for the benefit of His disciples the wounds in His hands and in His feet and in His side—**signs, if you will, that painful things happen even to the pure and the perfect; signs, if you will, that pain in this world is not evidence that God doesn’t love you; signs, if you will, that problems pass and happiness can be ours...These wounds are the principal way we are to recognize Him when He comes.** He may invite us forward, as He has invited others, to see and to feel those marks. If not before, then surely at that time, we will remember with Isaiah that it was for us that a God was “despised and rejected” ...that “he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.” Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, *Ensign*, Jan. 2003, 42, emphasis added.

⁴⁶ The Biblical Hebrew word for lion, *ari* אָרִי, located here in this verse, makes translation problematic. Alter explains, “**The received Hebrew text—literally “like a lion my hands and feet”—makes no sense.** The translation adopts one proposed emendation—reading *karkhu*, “they bound,” for *ka’ari*, “like a lion”—though there is admittedly no ancient textual warrant for this reading.” Robert Alter, p. 68. Shon Hopkin offers another way to examine this problem:

8. "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture" (Ps. 22.18).⁴⁷
9. "Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns" (Ps. 22.21).⁴⁸
10. "We may not intrude too closely into this scene. It is shrouded in a halo and a mystery into which no footstep may penetrate." Farrar, Ch. 57, 576.
11. "I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee" (Ps. 22.22).⁴⁹

(Ps. 22.16) provides what may be **the clearest prophecy of Christ's crucifixion anywhere in the Old Testament**, stating that "they pierced my hands and feet." The King James Version translation actually follows the Greek LXX in this case rather than the Hebrew Masoretic text. The Masoretic text instead offers the problematic "like a lion" (Heb. *ca'ari*) [they are at] my hands and my feet." This one word—"they pierced" in LXX or "like a lion" in the Masoretic text—**was one of the most significant points of Jewish and Christian controversy over biblical interpretation for many centuries. Jewish scholars maintained that the Masoretic text was the most correct version, and Jews were known to open a new Bible translation to this very verse in order to ascertain the bias of the translators. Christians, on the other hand, accused the Jewish people of tampering with the text and continued to aver that the translation "pierced" reflected the oldest understanding.** (See Gregory Vall, "Psalm 22:17B: 'The Old Guess,'" [Journal of Biblical Literature](#) 116, no. 1 (1997): 46–48.) In the past few decades, the Dead Sea Scrolls have finally offered some assistance and clarity on the subject, supporting a reading found in a minority of ancient Hebrew manuscripts. A small Psalms fragment from Nahal Hever (5/6 Hev-Se4Ps, Fragment 11) replaces the final yod, which would give the reading "like a lion," with a final waw, creating a verb most likely translated as "pierced" and thus providing "they pierced my hands and my feet," supporting the LXX witness. The yod and waw are the two letters most easily confused in Hebrew, explaining how the variant may have originated. (For more on this see Shon Hopkin, "[The Psalm 22:16 Controversy: New Evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls](#)," [BYU Studies](#) 44, no. 3 (2005): 161–72.)

⁴⁷ **This verse of Psalm 22 was alluded to in all four of the Gospel passion narratives.** Each of the three synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) share the same connections, mentioning that the persecutors "cast lots" (Gr. *ebalon klēron*) in order to divide the garments or raiment (Gr. *himatia*) of the sufferer. John's gospel, however, goes further. Although the verse in Psalms could be interpreted as simple Hebrew parallel structure—they "cast lots upon my vesture" is a poetic restatement of the equivalent phrase "they part my garments among them"—John instead saw a nuance in the parallel phrases that closely connected with Christ's experience. Not only did the persecutors divide Jesus's garments, but **John also mentions that there was a second "vesture" or "raiment," a special "coat . . . without seam, woven from the top throughout.** They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment (Gr. *himatia*) among them, and for my vesture (Gr. *himatismōn*) they did cast lots" (John 19:23–24). Once again, Psalm 22 points to Christ's sacrifice with detailed precision. Shon Hopkin, "[My God, My God, Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me? Psalm 22 and the Mission of Christ](#)," [BYU Studies Quarterly](#), 52:4, emphasis added.

⁴⁸ The symbols of the dog (the Gentile Romans?) and the lion (the wicked Jewish leaders?) again surface in this section. **Justin Martyr saw a clear allusion to the Crucifixion** in verse 21 that would be missed by most modern readers. **For him the "horns of the unicorn"** (a KJV translation better rendered as "horns of the wild ox") **are a visual reminder of the arms of the cross to which Christ was nailed.** (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 105.) God had indeed heard Christ's laments and pleas "from the horns," or from the cross. Hopkin, Psalm 22 and the Mission of Christ, emphasis added.

⁴⁹ Both Justin Martyr and Augustine struggled in connecting these sections with Christ because of doctrinal difficulties. **Since both partook of the developing Christian belief that Christ and God would no longer speak from the heavens after Jesus's ascension, they were not able to see continuing revelation in the statement "I will declare thy name unto my brethren" (Ps. 22:22).** Augustine, in a solution that would be comfortable for most Latter-day Saints, saw the continued witness of Christ as an allusion to the Holy Communion (known as the sacrament in Latter-day Saint terminology), since in that rite the Catholics believed that Jesus descends from heaven to connect man with the Father again. (Augustine, *St. Augustine on the Psalms*, 1:221–22.)...

12. This last part of the Psalm teaches us about the Savior's post mortal ministry (Ps. 22:22-31).⁵⁰
- a. "I will declare thy name" (Ps. 22:22).
 - b. "All the seed of Jacob, glorify him!" (Ps. 22:23).
 - c. "The meek shall eat and be satisfied!" (Ps. 22:26).
 - d. "They shall praise the Lord!" (Ps. 22:26).
 - e. "Your heart shall live forever!" (Ps. 22:26).
 - f. "All the ends of the world shall remember!" (Ps. 22:27).
 - g. "The Kingdom is the Lord's!" (Ps. 22:28).
 - h. "All they that go down to the dust shall bow before him!"⁵¹ (Ps. 22:29)
 - i. "My seed shall serve him!"⁵² (Ps. 22:30)

Psalm 23: The Plan of Salvation

Baker and Ricks assert that Psalm 23 shows the Plan of Salvation in the pattern of a three-act play. They write, "While the 23rd Psalm is very short, it is remarkably complete: Its surface text is almost

The LDS belief in both the reality of Christ's preaching in the spirit world and the reality of Christ's living voice and continued witness to the world in modern days equips them to understand this beautiful section more fully than any other people. The sufferer's statement, "I will declare thy [the Father's] name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee" beautifully reflects Christ's important witness immediately after his death when visiting those waiting for him in the spirit world. [Doctrine and Covenants 138](#) describes this gathering in terms reminiscent of the "congregation" mentioned in Psalm 22:41 "And there were gathered together in one place an innumerable company of the spirits of the just. . . . While this vast multitude waited and conversed, . . . the Son of God appeared, declaring liberty to the captives who had been faithful; and there he preached to them the everlasting gospel" ([D&C 138:12–19](#)). In this context, the psalmist's statement that God had not "despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from [them]; but when [they] cried unto him, he heard" not only refers to God hearing Christ in the midst of his affliction but also fits Joseph F. Smith's description of the congregation assembled waiting for Christ, whose cries God had also heard.

⁵⁰ LeGrand L. Baker and Stephen D. Ricks explain, "The final third of the 22nd Psalm . . . tells that after the Savior left the cross, he descended in triumph into the Underworld. **The last third of that psalm takes place 'in the midst of the congregation' of the dead—just as in D&C 138.** It is remarkable how closely the psalm's account maps to the concepts found in President Joseph F. Smith's revelation. Both teach the same things." LeGrand L. Baker and Stephen Ricks, *Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord? The Psalms in Israel's Temple Worship in the Old Testament and in the Book of Mormon*, Eborn Books, 2009, 435–36, emphasis added.

⁵¹ This has clear reference to the dead departed, the spirits "down in the dust."

⁵² Robert Alter explains the alternate reading, "The Masoretic Text simply says, unidiomatically, "seed," but there are manuscripts that show "my seed." Alter, p. 70. Shon Hopkin ties this verse powerfully into the testimony of the Book of Mormon prophets: The final verses of Psalm 22 again connect with that other twin pillar of Old Testament prophecy about Christ. **Isaiah 53:10 also teaches that when Christ suffered for the sins of mankind, he would "see his seed." That seed, those spiritually begotten (Mosiah 5:7) through Christ's Atonement, "shall serve him" (Ps. 22:30), both in this life and throughout the eternities.** In the last days, Peter, James, John, and other saints from ages past—a portion of Christ's seed—" [should] come, and . . . declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born" (Ps. 22:31), those of the latter-day Restoration who are spiritually alive in Christ. The same is occurring in the spirit world, where "from among the righteous, he organized his forces and appointed messengers, clothed with power and authority, and commissioned them to go forth and carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness, even to all the spirits of men[,] . . . to declare the acceptable day of the Lord and proclaim liberty to the captives who were bound, even unto all who would repent of their sins and receive the gospel" (D&C 138:30–31). **According to the concluding statement of Psalm 22:31, what do these messengers proclaim on earth and in heaven? They declare "the gospel" (D&C 138:30); they teach that "[Christ] hath done this" (Ps. 22:31).** Shon Hopkin, "[My God, My God, Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me? Psalm 22 and the Mission of Christ](#)," *BYU Studies Quarterly*, 52:4, emphasis added.

universally acknowledged to be one of the most beautiful poems ever written. Its subtext is awesome. The subtext is not hidden, it is only not apparent to those who do not know its sacral language. It is a short play, divided into three acts: (1) the premortal existence; (2) “the valley of the shadow of death”; (3) and finally “I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”⁵³

1. “I shall not want” (Ps. 23.1).
2. “Green pastures... still waters” (Ps. 23.2).⁵⁴
3. “The Valley of the Shadow of Death”⁵⁵ (Ps. 23.4).
4. “Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (Ps. 23.4).⁵⁶
5. “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies” (Ps. 23.5).⁵⁷

⁵³ Baker and Ricks, *Who Shall Ascend?* p. 441. The explanation of Psalm 23 covers pages 441-456.

⁵⁴ Ps. 23.1-3 can be read as verses having to do with our life before mortality. See Baker and Ricks, p. 441-446.

⁵⁵ We are now in the mortal sphere. Ibid, p. 445.

⁵⁶ **A rod is a symbol of kingship. It is the same as the royal scepter that is the branch of the Tree of Life.** Aaron’s staff was a symbol of priesthood authority. When Aaron’s authority was challenged, he put his staff in the ground and the next morning it had blossomed. Thereafter that staff was kept in the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies. It also represented the Tree of Life. **The Tree of Life is the Love of God. The powers of priesthood and kingship must be exercised as an expression of that love. “Comfort” is to empower, just as it is in the introduction to the coronation ceremony in Isaiah 61:1-3, where the “comfort” (empowerment) is accomplished through the coronation ceremony which includes washing, anointing, clothing, crowning, and giving a new name.** The coronation depicted in this part of the psalm is apparently a this-world re-play of the earlier “he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.” The intent of this verse might read, “Even though I am in the darkness of this world, I have no reason to fear, for I am empowered by the symbols of kingship (rod) and of priesthood (staff).” The relationship between the kingly authority of the rod and Melchizedek priesthood authority seem to have been established in the 110th Psalm. Baker and Ricks, p. 447-448, emphasis added.

⁵⁷ **The table prepared was the temple feast for the whole community. It was the great triumphal feast at the conclusion of the ancient temple drama.** However, its symbolism was much older than the Law of Moses, and it represents something far more important than a temporal meal. A possible example is when Melchizedek met Abraham returning from rescuing Lot. He received tithes from Abraham and brought bread and wine to serve to him. Melchizedek was High Priest of Salem. Not only did he build a temple there, but he also gave the city a new name, Jerusalem, city of peace.

The meal in the 23rd Psalm is the Temple feast and might be thought of as the meat that was taken from the seething pot at the Temple in Jerusalem. There the people who offered a peace or thanks offering sat with the priests and ate the meat of the sacrifice. If these are the meals the psalmist referred to by the words, “Thou preparest a table before me,” then **he was also talking about symbolically eating in the presence of the Lord.** In any case it was a royal banquet, where Jehovah confirmed the rule of the king and his approval of the people.

It was also a remembering of the feast when men actually did eat in the presence of God. There are several examples of such a temple feast. The first was with Moses on Mount Sinai. Others were the Last Supper, and the Savior’s sharing food with the people of Nephi. All of these are represented by the bread and water of the sacrament:

in the presence of mine enemies.

The enemies are an important part of the story because however much they may persist in being there, they are not present at the table. **The enemies are not invited to the meal; they are round about, trying to upset things, but their anger is irrelevant to both the peace and security of the occasion.** They are of no consequence no matter how much fuss they make. **It was a reiteration of the promise of invulnerability—that the covenants will**

6. "Surely goodness and mercy (hesed) shall follow me all the days of my life" (Ps. 23.6).⁵⁸
7. "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Ps. 23.6).⁵⁹

Psalm 24: Who Shall Ascend Into the Hill of the Lord?⁶⁰

1. "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?" (Ps. 24.3).
2. "He that has clean hands and a pure heart" (Ps. 24.4).
3. "This is the generation of them that seek him" (Ps. 24.6).
4. "Lift up your heads, O ye gates!" (Ps. 24.7)⁶¹
 - a. The psalm was not only a command that the doors of the Temple be opened, it was also a declaration of their worthiness to enter the Temple.⁶²

be fulfilled no matter who tries to prevent it. It was as though the psalmist were describing himself as living within a glass bubble, through whose walls he can communicate with the world, but none can come in except by invitation. Those who come in find an intimacy of pure love. The world may rage on as it will, but his soul transcends the rage, and in the bubble he finds peace. Baker and Ricks, p. 449-450, emphasis added.

⁵⁸ אֲנִי חַיִּי יְהוָה יִרְדְּפוּנִי כָּל-יְמֵי חַיִּי can also be read "but let goodness and lovingkindness pursue me all the days of my life."

⁵⁹ Baker and Ricks put this part of verse 6 with Act Three, the conclusion of our lives when the Saints are brought into the presence of the Lord. They write, "If the 23rd Psalm were sung on the eighth day of the festival temple drama, it would have represented both a summation and a continued promise of all that the ceremony had shown." Baker and Ricks, p. 451.

⁶⁰ Baker and Ricks describe how Psalm 24 may be broken down into four parts, each portion a reflection of a different portion of the procession into the temple. They are getting their analysis from Hermann Gunkel, German Old Testament scholar. They state, "Gunkel's analysis of the 24th Psalm was so convincing that a whole generation of scholars accepted it." Baker and Ricks, p. 46.

⁶¹ God, as it were, enters the Temple. The Temple gates open for the Ark, symbolizing God's presence, to enter. The gates "lift up their heads," a metaphoric expression for joyously welcoming God, pictured as a victorious king returning home to his palace. *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 1308. **The final four verses (24:7-10) are "of a kind associated with a procession of the ark" with a liturgical "form, having a question-response format".** It begins with a statement by the ark-bearers ("Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the king of glory shall come in" Psalm 24:7), a question by the gatekeepers ("Who is this king of glory?" Psalm 24:8a), a response by the ark-bearers "The lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in" Psalm 24:8b-9), a second question by the gatekeepers ("Who is this King of glory?" Psalm 24:10a), and a final response by the arkbearers ("The Lord of hosts, he is the king of glory" Psalm 24:10b) . **Strikingly, these verses are similar to lines in Ugaritic poetry: *sh'u 'ilm r'ashtkm*, "lift up your heads, O you gods."** (Peter Craigie, *Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 19, Psalm 1-50*, Word Books, 1983, p. 214.) Baker and Ricks, p. 15, emphasis added. For a study showing that the gates of a city were used for the ceremonial entrance of the gods, see Richard D. Barnett, "Bringing the God into the Temple," *Temples and High Places in Biblical Times*, Jerusalem: Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1981, 10-20.

⁶² Weinfeld explains:

Psalms 15, 24:3-6 and Isaiah 33:14-16 specify the moral qualities required for admission to the Temple. All these texts have an identical structure. Each one opens with an interrogative: "Who will dwell in the house" or "Who will ascend the holy mount", then proceeds to describe the conditions for entrance and ends with a promise for the one who will fulfill these conditions. 1) Thus Psalm 15 opens with the question: "Lord, who may dwell in your tent ...who may reside on your holy mountain?" The answer is: he who walks in perfection who does what is right, etc., who speaks the truth from his heart who has never slandered who has never done harm to his fellowswho honors those who fear the Lord who stands by his oath even to his hurt who has never lent money at interest or

Psalm 25-28: David Pleads with the Lord⁶³

1. "Shew me thy ways" (Ps. 25.4).
2. "Lead me in thy truth" (Ps. 25.5).
3. "Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies and thy lovingkindness" (Ps. 25.6).⁶⁴
4. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him" (Ps. 25.14).⁶⁵
5. "Forgive all my sins" (Ps. 25.18).
6. "Thy lovingkindness is before mine eyes: and I have walked in thy truth" (Ps. 26.3).⁶⁶
7. "I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth" (Ps. 26.8).
8. "The Lord is my light" (Ps. 27.1).
9. The author seeks to dwell in the temple "all the days of my life" (Ps. 27.4).
10. "In the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock" (Ps. 27.5).
11. "Leave me not... teach me thy way... deliver me" (Ps. 27.9-12).
12. The author pleads for his voice to be heard what "I lift up my hands toward thy holy oracle" (Ps. 28.2).⁶⁷
13. The author pleads for the promise of invulnerability to come pass (Ps. 28.3-9).⁶⁸

Psalm 29: The Majesty of God

1. This psalm fits into a category of Psalms that deal with God's power over chaos.⁶⁹
2. "Grant unto the Lord, O sons of God..." (Ps. 29.1 Alter translation).⁷⁰

accepted a bribe against the innocent. Baker and Ricks, p. 331. (Moshe Weinfeld, "Instructions for Temple Visitors in the Bible and in Ancient Egypt," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 28 (1984), p. 224-50.)

⁶³ Psalm 25 is one of nine alphabetic acrostics in the Book of Psalms, a form used elsewhere in biblical poetry only in Lamentations. The acrostic may have been favored by psalmists as an aid to memory because of the liturgical use

of their texts. The sixth letter of the alphabet, *waw*, is missing here, as is the nineteenth letter, *qof*. Alter, p. 73.

⁶⁴ אֵלֶּיךָ יְהוָה וְחַסְדֶּיךָ יְהוָה – In this passage we have both *hesed* and *rehem*. *Rehem*, the Hebrew word for womb, is used to describe the compassion and love of God in many passages.

⁶⁵ סוֹד יְהוָה לִירְאֵיוּ – note that those in awe of God are invited into his *sod*, or secret council.

⁶⁶ כִּי־חַסְדֶּךָ לִנְגַד עֵינַי For thy *hesed* is before my eyes... once again we have the *hesed* of God described.

⁶⁷ בְּשֹׁמְעֵי אֲלֵיךָ בְּנִשְׂאֵי יְדֵי אֶל־דְּבִיר קֹדֶשְׁךָ "When I cry unto thee, when I lift up my hands to your holy debir/oracle" (Ps. 28.2). Here the writer of the Psalm is approaching the holy of holies with uplifted hands, asking for God to hear his prayer.

⁶⁸ These promises of invulnerability are throughout the Psalms as well in other locations. See Psalm 21.1-13; 25.1-22; 91.1-16; Jeremiah 1.9-10; 1 Nephi 21.1-6; 3 Nephi 12.8-9; 3 Nephi 22.17.

⁶⁹ Other psalms include 17.12-13 – The lion comes to take prey; 18.2-3 – The Lord is my rock, fortress, deliverer; 35.1-9 – The Lord will deliver his people; 46.2-7 – Yahweh defeats the enemies; 54.1-7; 59; 65.7-8; 74.12-17 – Breaking apart the leviathan; 76.1-6 – Yahweh defeats his enemies; 89.10-12 – Rahab is broken into pieces, Hermon shall rejoice in thy name; 91.13 – You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; 93; 104.1-9.

⁷⁰ This is the first clue of many that have led a whole line of scholars (H. L. Ginsberg, Moshe Held, Mitchell Dahood, Theodore Gaster) to see this psalm as a translation or close adaptation of a Canaanite psalm. It has been variously claimed that in the original text, it was Baal as thundergod, not YHWH, who imposed his fearsome voice over the whole world. None of these arguments is entirely convincing. Although there are parallels to certain wordings here in Ugaritic poetry (the one cache of Syro-Palestinian poetry, several centuries prior to the Bible, that has physically survived), that scarcely proves that this poem is a translation. Alter, p. 81.

3. "The voice of the Lord is upon the waters" (Ps. 29.3).⁷¹
4. "The Lord sitteth King forever" (Ps. 29.10).⁷²

Psalm 30-33: Thanks and Praise

1. "I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me." (Ps. 20.3).
2. "In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust... deliver me in thy righteousness" (Ps. 31.1).
3. "For thou art my rock and my fortress... for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me" (Ps. 31.3).
4. "Into thy hand I commit my spirit" (Ps. 31.5).⁷³
5. "I am like a broken vessel" (Ps. 31.12).
6. "They devised to take away my life, but I trusted in thee, O Lord... deliver me from the hand of mine enemies... make thy face to shine upon thy servant... let me not be ashamed" (Ps. 31.13-17).
7. "Thou art my hiding place, thou shalt preserve me from trouble" (Ps. 32.7).
8. "The Lord looketh from heaven, he beholdeth the sons of men. From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth" (Ps. 33.13-14).

Psalm 40: The King's Feet are Established

1 I waited patiently for the Lord;
and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.

2 He brought me up also out of an horrible pit,
out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock,
and established my goings (Psalm 40:1-2).

The missing phrase, "for the feet of those who are in the east shall be established" is a promise of sacral kingship. The "east" is the place where the righteous dwell. The reference to their feet being "established" is a reminder of the time when the king sat upon the throne of God in the Holy of Holies, with the Ark of the Covenant as the footstool to that throne. The promise in Isaiah is a promise of sacral kingship. One gets a glimpse of it in the 40th Psalm that was probably sung as a celebration of the triumph of the great feast day of the drama.⁷⁴ This Psalm fits into what are commonly called "enthronement psalms."⁷⁵

1. "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O LORD, thou knowest" (Ps. 40.9).

⁷¹ This is explained by seeing how the ancients viewed the cosmos, with the waters being above the firmament, and the throne of God in the heavens above the waters.

⁷² John Day sees Psalm 29 as set in the Feast of Tabernacles and as Yahweh's victory over the Sea and his lordship over all of creation. Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament*, University of Cambridge, 1985, p. 58.

⁷³ See Luke 23.46.

⁷⁴ Baker and Ricks, p. 414.

⁷⁵ For a list of these, see: [Overview of the First Israelite Temple Drama](#).

2. “Withhold not thou thy tender mercies (רַחֲמֶיךָ) from me, O LORD: let thy lovingkindness (רַחֲמֶיךָ) and thy truth continually preserve me” (Ps. 40.11).

Psalm 46: God is in the Midst of His City

1. “There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad **the city of God**, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. **God is in the midst of her**; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early” (Ps. 46.4-5).⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Yahweh is Lord of the universe, but the seat of His rule is Zion, the holy hill. The poets of Israel have also drawn upon ancient Near Eastern mythology in their description of Zion and of Yahweh’s rule there. **In Psalm 46, Zion is the mountain-city from which the waters flow out to water the earth** (see Genesis 2:10-14; Ezekiel 28). Psalm 48 is an even more mythological hymn, representing Zion to be the meeting place of heaven and earth. The nations sought to storm the city but Yahweh scattered them in His wrath. ...For these psalmists, Zion is already the center of the universe, the fount of blessing for both Israel and the foreign nations. Baker and Ricks, p. 103, emphasis added. See also: Walter J. Harrelson, [Interpreting the Old Testament](#), Rinehart and Winston, 1964, 414.