REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY – CHARLOTTE

“THE PSALMIST AND BAAL WORSHIP”:
THE POLEMICAL CHAOSKAMPF OF PSALM 93
FOR THE EXILIC COMMUNITY

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BY

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The role of the psalmist often overlaps with the role of the prophet in calling Israel to remember the God whom they serve. This occurs all too often, for the Israelites, just as modern Christians, are "prone to wander" despite the best of intentions. In the case of Israel, this often involved wandering to the worship of Baal, as is seen in the lament of Elijah (I Kings 19:9–18). Thus the repetition of Israelite wanderings toward Baal worship results in a category of anti-Baal polemical Psalms, as seen in Psalms 29, 82, and 89, among others.[1] This is of particular significance as Israel goes into exile, for they will be in direct contact with the Babylonian cultic system for numerous years to come.[2] As such, it is to be expected that Book IV of the Psalter will also contain cases of the anti-Baal polemic. Not only does this turn out to be the case, but the psalmist utilizes the Canaanite chaoskampf genre to accomplish this. The chaoskampf is a divine, primordial battle through which the victor establishes order.[3] Therefore, it will be argued that Psalm 93 is an instance of the anti-Baal polemical psalm which plays off the Baal-Yam and Marduk-Tiamat chaoskampfs in order to urge the exilic community to hold fast to Yahweh while in the midst of Babylon. To

[1] For a general overview on this type of Psalm, see John D. Currid, *Against the Gods: The Polemical Theology of the Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 134–41., and regarding the specific polemic used for each Psalm, see Willem A. VanGemeren, *Psalms*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 291–96; 626–27; 670.

[2] Regarding the exilic context of Book IV, see VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 687–88. Moreover, there is broad consensus that the dating of Psalm 93 is to the tenth century, but as VanGemeren notes, "the canonical shape of the psalm in the MT bears no hint of an original cultic situation." However, this is not an issue for the evangelical, for the dating of Book IV to the exilic period and the dating of Psalm 93 to the tenth century are not mutually exclusive claims. This is particularly due to the fact that the early dating is not contingent upon Mowinckel's claim that the Israelites are developing through henotheism at the time. Instead, Tate notes the many contextual and linguistic factors that lead to this conclusion. Moreover, the Psalms in Book IV were written at least prior to or during the exile, and were consequently compiled for the use of the exile generation. It need not be maintained that the psalms were all written with the exile generation immediately in mind. See VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 707; Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms II: 51-100*, 3rd ed., The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1974), 339., but particularly note Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, vol. 20 of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 478–79.

[3] David Toshio Tsumura, "Chaos and Chaoskampf in the Bible: Is 'Chaos' a Suitable Term to Describe Creation or Conflict in the Bible?," in *Conversations on Canaanite and Biblical Themes: Creation, Chaos and Monotheism* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2022), 245–46.

accomplish this, an annotated translation will be given, followed by a consideration of the broader position of Psalm 93 within the Psalter as well as the entire Bible. Then Canaanite myth will be considered more in depth and conclusions of this study applied specifically to the passage. Finally, the modern meaning will be discussed.

Translation with Poetic Breaks

Stanza 1:	יְהוָה מָלָךְ	1a	The LORD reigns,[a]
2+2//2+2	גֵּאוּת לָבֵשׁ	b	he is robed[b] with majesty.[c]
	לָבֵשׁ יְהוָה	c	The LORD is robed [with majesty],[d]
	עֹז הִתְאַזָּר	d	he has girded himself[e] with strength.
Stanza 2:	אַף תִּכּוֹן תֵּבֵל	e	The dry land[f] was established,[g]
3+2//3+2	בַּל תִּמּוֹט׃	f	it cannot be moved.[h]
	נָכוֹן כִּסְאֲךָ מֵאָז	2a	Your throne was established[i] from of old,[j]
	מֵעוֹלָם אָתָּה׃	b	you [are] from everlasting.[k]
Stanza 3:	נָשְׂאוּ נְהָרוֹת יְהוָה	3a	The floods[l] have lifted up,[m] O LORD,[n]
3+3+3	נָשְׂאוּ נְהָרוֹת קוֹלָם	b	the floods have lifted up their voice,[o]
	יִשְׂאוּ נְהָרוֹת דָּכְיָם׃	c	the floods have lifted up[p] their waves.
Stanza 4:	מִקֹּלוֹת מַיִם רַבִּים	4a	More than[q] the voice of many waters,
3+3+3	אַדִּירִים מִשְׁבְּרֵי יָם	b	[more than][r] the mighty waves of the sea,[s]
	אַדִּיר בַּמָּרוֹם יְהוָה׃	c	mighty is the LORD on high.[t]
Stanza 5:	עֵדֹתֶיךָ נֶאֶמְנוּ מְאֹד	5a	Your statutes[u] are exceedingly trustworthy;[v]
3+3+3	לְבֵיתְךָ נַאֲוָה קֹדֶשׁ	b	holiness adorns your house,[w]
	יְהוָה לְאֹרֶךְ יָמִים׃	c	O LORD, for endless days.

Translation Justification and Notes

a. Contra Mowinckel, the translation of the verse need not be "The LORD has become king."[4] As Tate notes, the most definitive defense against Mowinckel's charge is from Diethelm Michel.[5] However, to comment on the issue, must begin by acknowledging that this is a possible translation due to the wide variation in potential translation within Hebrew literature. However, the impetus for Mowinckel's charge to translate the verse as such is not well grounded, instead relying upon the assumption that the Israelites were "plagiarists," assuming Canaanite cultic practices without significant emendation.[6] As Bullock notes, the Psalm's location in Book IV suggests that the nature of Yahweh as king is reaffirmed without at any point suggesting that Yahweh was not king.[7] There is no reason to believe that the Israelites ever considered Yahweh not to be king. Therefore, there is not a sufficient reason to deny the plain reading of the text, "The LORD reigns."
b. The verb לָבֵשׁ (Qal Pf 3MS לבש) is seen to be an intransitive verb due to the diacritical marking.[8] Furthermore, it generally refers to the act of putting on a garment, but may also be used metaphorically such as in this situation, particularly due to its intransitive nature. In some situations in the Qal stem, the verb may be translated reflexively, but it has not been here in order to retain the plain meaning. However, it must be noted that the reflexive translation, "he *has robed himself* with majesty" is the clear import of the clause, for only God can robe himself with majesty.[9]
c. "Majesty" (גֵּאוּת) is fronted within the clause for emphasis. The word is from the root גאה, which normatively refers to pride. However, as Smith and Hamilton note, "when used to describe God, this root and its derivatives refer to his majesty or excellence…God is exalted in his gracious act of salvation, deliverance, and preservation."[10] Its introduction in this clause engenders its inference within the following clause.
d. Mirroring the previous clause, v. 1c instead contains an explicit subject with an implied indirect object. The natural reading of the clause is to take the indirect object from the prior clause.
e. The root of the verb in the clause, אזר, has connotations of war, emphasized here by the indirect object, "strength."[11] The reflexive character of the Hithpael strengthens the

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[4] Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), 1:115.

[5] See Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 472.; cf. Diethelm Michel, "Studien Zu Den Sogenannten Thron-Besteigungspsalmen," *VT* 6.1 (1956): 40–68.

[6] Currid, *Against the Gods: The Polemical Theology of the Old Testament*, 139–41.

[7] C. Hassell Bullock, *Psalms: Psalms 73-150*, ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, TTCS (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), 159.

[8] Christo H.J. van der Merwe, Jacobus A. Naude, and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 2nd ed. (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 76.

[9] "לבש," *HALOT*, 2:519.

[10] Gary V. Smith and Victor P. Hamilton, "גאה," *NIDOTTE* 1:787.

[11] "אזר," *HALOT*, 1:28.

inferred reflexive character of the verbs within the two prior clauses. It is also of note that the stanza ends not with a focus on the peace of God's reign, but rather on connotations of war.

f. Although 'world' is an acceptable gloss for translation, it is important to note that תֵּבֵל connotes the land, "especially the inhabited and cultivated areas of the mainland."[12] This furthers the contrast that the psalmist is making between the firm and established ground of Yahweh and the waves of chaos, exemplified in Yam and Tiamat. Note also that while אַף has been left untranslated, its presence in the verse suggests that the particle is used in its asseverative sense by the psalmist to "express a conviction as to [the statement's] correctness."[13]

g. In using the verb כון, the psalmist here begins a comparison which will be concluded in v. 2b. Furthermore, תִּכּוֹן (Ni., Impf., 3MS) not only contextually but canonically connotes God as a kingly creator.[14]

h. The verb מוט is used most often in poetic literature with the normative meaning of wavering or staggering.[15] However, when used in poetic contexts, the verb takes on a certain nuance, particularly when describing phenomena in nature. As such, when combined with the negative particle בַּל, the verb תִּמּוֹט (Ni., Impf., 3FS) "expresses great security or dependability," emphasizing the surety of the Lord's established reign and creation.[16] This strengthens the already firmly established creation in v. 1e.

i. The repetition of כון in the form נָכוֹן (Ni., Pf., 3MS) draws a parallel between the verses of the second stanza. That is, God's throne is established as firmly as the very ground of earth itself. Furthermore, it is important God's throne (כִּסְאֶךָ) is mentioned here, for as Dahood mentions, it forms an inclusio with the house of the Lord in v. 5b, emphasizing God's reign in a manner akin to the myth of Baal.[17]

j. The construction מֵאָז is used temporally with respect to the point at which the dry land was established, implying from the beginning of creation.[18] Furthermore, as van der Merwe et al. note, this is one of "a few instances of מֵאָז [in which] the preposition מִן appears to have lost its meaning, so that אָז and מֵאָז are near synonyms," thus leading to the translation "from of old" or "from long ago."[19]

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[12] "תֵּבֵל," *HALOT*, 4:1682.

[13] Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 143.

[14] Elmer A. Martens, "כון," *NIDOTTE* 2:616.

[15] William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1971), 185.

[16] M.V. Van Pelt and W. C. Kaiser, "מוט," *NIDOTTE* 2:865–66.

[17] Dahood, *Psalms II: 51-100*, 340–42.

[18] Arnold and Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 139–40.

[19] van der Merwe, Naude, and Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 387.

k. V. 2 ends with a verbless clause but the copula is clearly implied. Furthermore, the clause's position in the verse leads to the parallel between God's everlasting nature and the immovable dry land.
l. The floods here could have numerous possible referents, but as Tate notes, "the roaring, pounding turbulence of the seas represents a cosmogonic challenge to God and the world regardless of its implementation."[20] The psalmist uses נהר instead of ים, which would weaken the Ugaritic parallels except that ים is used later in the psalm, so נְהָרוֹת is clearly synonymous, which is consistent with the Ugaritic usage of *nhr*.[21] Thus although 'rivers' is the natural sense of the word, 'floods' has been chosen to emphasize this link.
m. The poetic v. 3 centers around the verb נשׂא, here נָשְׂאוּ (Qal, Pf., 3MP). The stem has moved from the causative Hiphil in v. 2 to an emphasis upon actions that Yahweh seemingly doesn't directly cause through the use of the Qal stem.
n. Since יְהוָה is clearly not the object of the verb, it has been translated in the vocative, which is the scholarly consensus.[22]
o. The verbal object is in fact found in the second line of the stanza, קוֹלָם or 'their voice.' The translation of this word is a matter of some contention, as there are a number of senses that can be given based on the translator's choice. Dahood chooses to render it as "their thunderous roar," but this suggestion is based upon connotations of the Ugaritic *ql*.[23] Kedar-Kopfstein notes that the "thundering *qôl* generally accompanies a theophany or is construed directly as the voice of God," and instead places the usage under a generic category of the natural sounds of mighty streams.[24] As such, the normal rendering of 'voice' has been kept in order to leave the sense of the translation consistent without forcing the reader into too specific an interpretation of the sound of floods.
p. There is scholarly debate regarding the tense of the final form of נשׂא, here יִשְׂאוּ (Qal, Impf., 3MP). However, in order to avoid suggesting textual emendations, it is possible to maintain that due to the fluidity of tense with regard to the Hebrew verbal system, the Imperfect conjugation here maintains the past tense of v. 3a, b.[25]
q. The prefixed מִן in מִקֹּלוֹת is taken to be comparative due to the contextual use of אַדִּיר, 'mighty,' in v. 4b, c.[26]
r. Despite not having a מִן prefix, the comparison clearly continues, which is reflected in the translation.
s. The first mention of יָם arises in v. 4b, which is naturally the clearest mention of Prince Yam from the Ugaritic material. However, it is telling that יָם is mentioned in a parallel

[20] Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 480.

[21] Huizen L. A. Snijders, "נָהָר," *TDOT* 9:264.

[22] Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 480.

[23] Dahood, *Psalms II: 51-100*, 341.

[24] Haifa Kedar-Kopfstein, "קוֹל," *TDOT* 12:579.

[25] Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 480.

[26] Arnold and Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 131.

comparison with the waves of the sea. This lends further credence to the conclusion in note l of an equivalence relationship between ים and נהר.

t. The comparison concludes with the mighty power of Yahweh emphasized. He is said to be "on high" (בַּמָּרוֹם), which can indicate a high social or moral position, but in this situation likely refers to the placement of Yahweh's house to make a contrast with the Canaanite gods (cf. Is. 33:5).[27]

u. The psalmist turns from the chaotic oceans to the Lord's statutes (עֵדֹתֶיךָ) in v. 5. As such, God's Law is the very antithesis of chaos, bringing order where there would be none.

v. The psalmist uses the verb אמן to stress the characteristic of God's Law as being reliable. The form present here (נֶאֶמְנוּ, Ni., Pf., 3MP) can suggest being firmly established, but Moberly notes that "this does does just mean that [God's commandments] are true as opposed to false, but that they also have the character of being trustworthy and reliable for people to base their lives on."[28] Not only this, but the character of the Law as trustworthy is grounded upon God's character, providing further implications for the transcendent picture of Yahweh provided in v. 5.[29]

w. As Dahood notes, "Baal, victorious over Yamm, could not fully exercise his royal powers until he had his own palace," and he goes on to suggest that Yahweh created his temple in a "consolidation of his royal power…in which the construction of a palace follows a victory and acquisition of kingship."[30] While this understanding will be argued against later, it is sufficient to note that the use of 'house' or 'temple' (בית) is mirrored in Ugaritic myth.

Intertextual Connections

The Psalms, Book IV

Psalm 93 is located in Book IV of the Psalter, a book that is revelatory of the situation of the Israelites in exile. At the end of Book III, Psalms 88 and 89 poignantly illustrate the destruction of Israel and the consequent failure of the Davidic dynasty. Then Book IV begins with a spotlight upon the sins of the people. But the psalmist of Psalm 90 brings the people back to one of the sources of Israel's relationship with God: Moses. The Psalm, which is a community lament, refocuses Israel upon God's immutability and their failure to live in

[27] Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 214–15.

[28] R. W. L. Moberly, "אמן," *NIDOTTE* 1:428.

[29] Moberly, *NIDOTTE* 1:429–30.

[30] Dahood, *Psalms II: 51-100*, 343.

accordance with His decrees. Bullock notes that this Psalm is akin to the Exodus 32 golden calf incident in that Moses once again pleads with God on their behalf.[31]

Following the Psalm 90 plea, the psalmist of Psalm 91 expands upon God's character, emphasizing his grace and protection. As Bullock notes, "Psalm 91 has a hand-in-glove relationship to Psalm 90,"[32] wherein the portrayal of God's wrath and anger in Psalm 90 is balanced by the imagery of God as a protective fortress. Not only this, but the Psalmist emphatically declares in v. 14a that "He has attached himself to me in love." Book IV has moved from a place of devastation to a place of confident trust and reliance upon God to deliver the people whom He loves.

Building upon the confident trust of Psalm 91, the thanksgiving psalm of Psalm 92 is denoted as a Sabbath song. The Psalm is bracketed by praise of Yahweh (vv. 1–3; 15) with thanksgiving given throughout.[33] That the Psalm is designated for the Sabbath suggests that even amidst disaster, the day of the Lord is a day of hope. Bullock writes, "this hope grew out of the smoldering ashes of Israel's greatest tragedy,"[34] thus intentionally renewing the Israelites' confidence in the saving character of Yahweh who deserves Sabbath praise even in exile.

Psalm 93 therefore is situated in a section of renewed confidence and praise of Yahweh. Book IV has started by acknowledging the sins of Israel, pointing them to God's sustaining power, reminding them of his protection, and giving thanks to God for all that he has done. The onset of Psalm 93, the first of the kingship psalms, thus continues the

[31] Bullock, *Psalms*, 135.

[32] Bullock, *Psalms*, 141.

[33] VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 701.

[34] Bullock, *Psalms*, 151.

systematic reminder of God's nature by pointing the exiles to God's sovereignty and righteous reign. The psalm is verbally linked with Psalm 92,[35] suggesting that the kingship of Yahweh is to result in praise. Not only this, but Book IV of the Psalter was written or compiled specifically for the exile generation. Thus the fact that it addresses their specific situation implies that particular attention must be given to the possibility of polemical content against the Babylonian religious system.

Exodus 15

It was noted above that Book IV of the Psalms begins by calling Israel's attention back to Moses. His status within the redemptive-historical story of Israel is of the utmost importance at this point, for he led them out of captivity first. However, the connections to Moses do not end with Psalm 90 but may be found in Psalm 93 as well. In particular, Bullock notes that there is a connection between the psalm and the Song of Moses in Exodus 15. Here he points out numerous verbal links, including the Lord's reign, the establishment of his throne, and the mighty waters.[36] While the verbal links are interesting, it is even more compelling to note that this song is a response to God's triumph over the Egyptian forces of evil. In this song, the mighty waters are used as an act of judgment.

It is not merely the Egyptians which Yahweh triumphs over in this song. As vv. 11–12 state, "Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? … You stretched out your right hand; the earth swallowed them" (Ex. 15:11–12, ESV). There can be no recourse to other gods, for Yahweh has defeated them just as he defeated the Egyptians through the Red Sea. Thus the

[35] Bullock, *Psalms*, 157.

[36] Bullock, *Psalms*, 158.

psalmist's choice to make reference to Moses's Song is suggestive of Yahweh's victory over not merely the earthly powers and authorities but their gods as well.

1 Chronicles 16

In 1 Chronicles 16, David sings a song of thanks to God for the return of the ark to Jerusalem. The return of the ark is of such importance that theologies of the Psalms have been grounded upon the event.[37] In context, David has conquered over the Philistines (14:8–17), prepared a place for the ark (15:1–24), and then brought it back to Jerusalem (15:25–29). After having placed the ark in the tent, David gives offerings to God and then appoints for thanksgiving to be sung (16:1–7). Then the song of David is outlined in 16:8–36. In the song, the phrases "The dry land was established, it cannot be moved" (אַף תִּכּוֹן תֵּבֵל בַּל תִּמּוֹט) and "The Lord reigns" (יְהוָה מָלָךְ) are repeated, with a further emphasis upon the seas. The song is thus thematically connected to Psalm 93, particularly as it declares the power and tumultuous nature of the seas in v. 32. Furthermore, in likeness to Moses's song, David announces the triumph of Yahweh over the gods of the nations (vv. 25–26). The unchanging nature of the God of Israel is a stark contrast to the chaotic sea that epitomizes the "worthless idols."

Ancient Near Eastern Myth

The cultures of the Ancient Near East have coordinating cultic entities. Due to cultural interaction or development, many cultures' pantheon of gods contain remarkable similarities, and their mythic stories are all but complete copies of each other. It is in light of this that the ancient Ugaritic and Babylonian chaoskampfs are of interest. In the Ugaritic material, the

[37] This is not to say that the views of Hans-Joachim Kraus are biblically grounded, rather that he does not put forth his view without good historical precedent for the importance of the return of the ark.

god Baal engages in battle against the sea god Yam. El, the head of the assembly of the gods, had declared that Baal was to be handed over to Yam, but desiring to become head of the gods himself, Baal killed Yam and was subsequently declared king.[38] Moreover, the conclusion of Baal as champion and king of the gods is declared, at which point Baal constructs his palace.[39] As mentioned, the Babylonian cult had a slightly modified version of this chaoskampf in the Enuma Elish. In that story Marduk, the king of the Babylonian pantheon, triumphed over the sea goddess Tiamat, thereby overcoming chaos and creating the world.[40] While Coogan and Smith mention that there are differences between the chaoskampfs,[41] the structure of each chaoskampf suggests a high degree of borrowing. In each case a powerful god, desiring even greater power, engages in battle against the deity of the sea, resulting in victory, creation, and the singing of their praises.[42]

Such stories would not have been unknown to the Israelites, for the OT routinely depicts the Israelites walking away from God to worship Baal. The prophets' repeated pleas with the Israelites regarding exactly this issue engender polemical interpretations to certain psalms. Such is the context of Psalm 29, which many evangelical scholars have seen to be a polemic against Baal.[43] In particular, Craigie writes, "the poet has deliberately utilized Canaanite-type language and imagery in order to emphasize the Lord's strength and victory,

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[38] Michael D. Coogan and Mark S. Smith, *Stories from Ancient Canaan*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 97–99.

[39] Jakob H. Groenbaek, "Baal's Battle with Yam: A Canaanite Creation Fight," *JSOT* 10.33 (1985): 31.

[40] Coogan and Smith, *Stories from Ancient Canaan*, 98; Groenbaek, "Baal's Battle with Yam: A Canaanite Creation Fight," 29.

[41] Coogan and Smith, *Stories from Ancient Canaan*, 98–99.

[42] Regarding the Baal-Yam and Marduk-Tiamat chaoskampfs resulting in creation, see Groenbaek, "Baal's Battle with Yam: A Canaanite Creation Fight," 28–29.

[43] VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 292.

in contrast to the weakness of the inimical Baal."[44] This psalm encourages the Israelites to see Yahweh as not merely another member of the ANE pantheon, but rather as the one true God over and against the weak Canaanite gods. By its nature as a hymn of praise sung during Israelite victory, the psalmist establishes that they are not reliant upon Canaanite literature for praise of Yahweh, but rather are polemically utilizing Canaanite literature to praise Yahweh's uniqueness and victory.[45] The Israelites do not develop into a monotheistic understanding of Yahweh but rather use the characteristics of competing ANE gods, such as Baal, to describe Yahweh's legitimate power in contrast with the Canaanite gods' weakness. It is in this tradition of polemical psalm seen in Psalms 29, 47, 94–100, and 1 Chronicles 16, that Psalm 93 may be placed.[46]

Psalm 93 as Chaoskampf

There is disagreement as to whether or not Psalm 93 actually may be considered to be a chaoskampf. Perhaps unsurprisingly, scholars such as Mowinckel, Weiser, and Gunkel all see Psalm 93 as an instance of the chaoskampf, albeit with the psalmist stealing and making a direct correspondence with the Ugaritic myths.[47] This thesis is directly based upon Mowinckel's scholarship regarding the enthronement festival. Mowinckel's work led him to the conclusion that the Ugaritic material was primary and the psalmists' use of Ugaritic material is suggestive of borrowed religious belief. Therefore, when Psalm 93 speaks of

[44] Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, Word Biblical Commentary 19 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), 246.

[45] Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 246.

[46] See Currid, *Against the Gods: The Polemical Theology of the Old Testament*, 135–37., regarding the polemical nature of Psalm 29, which has striking similarities with Psalm 93.

[47] Hermann Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, trans. James D. Nogalski (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 66–68; Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 1:145; Artur Weiser, *The Psalms*, trans. Herbert Hartwell (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), 619–20.

creation and alludes to the Baal-Yam chaoskampf, the psalmist does so because they have wholesale borrowed the chaoskampf material from Babylonian myth along with its associated enthronement festival for Baal. So Mowinckel claims,

> The annual re-creation of the world, when the fields rise to the surface of the 'primeval ocean' of the spring flood, finds expression in [the Marduk-Tiamat chaoskampf], and is each time made real again through the cultic rites connected with it. In all probability Israel did not take over these conceptions directly, but North Mesopotamian and Canaanite tales provided a connecting link…Whether the Israelites before or in the age of Moses looked upon Yahweh as the god of creation, we do not know. But the conception of a supreme god being at the same time the god of creation, was known in Canaan as well as in the civilized countries surrounding it. So it would not be very long before this thought was transferred to Yahweh.[48]

Such a conclusion is dubious at best, for it is significantly slanted against the claims of the Bible and gives precedence to the Canaanite material without adequately accounting for the significant differences in interpretation that arise in the Psalms. However, one must acknowledge that Mowinckel correctly notes that there are significant overlapping sections between Psalm 93 and the Ugaritic material.[49]

The reality of significant overlap must be considered. The rising of the floods in v. 3 as a symbol of "primeval rebellion" such as in Gen. 1 mirrors the Ugaritic myths.[50] The triumph of Yahweh over the primordial waters and the emphasis upon his house and the establishment of his throne are also to be seen in the myth of Baal. Moreover, Yahweh consequently establishes order through his statutes. These factors lead Mowinckel to conclude that the Israelites were celebrating the victory of Yahweh through festal celebration in a manner equivalent to that of the Canaanites. However, as Ollenburger concludes after

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[48] Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 1:145.

[49] See Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 1:143–44.

[50] Weiser, *The Psalms*, 620.

surveying the scholarly landscape, the significant overlap is not sufficient to credibly determine the presence and importance of Mowinckel's New Year festival.[51]

If Mowinckel's thesis is untenable, then perhaps Psalm 93 isn't a self-conscious chaoskampf at all. Dennis Sylva argues as such, maintaining that there is not sufficient grammatical support for seeing the psalm as a chaoskampf.[52] However, while Sylva's argument is perhaps convincing apart from a consideration of the Ugaritic material, its inclusion in the debate causes the argument to founder. Sylva's grammatical argument is convincing from a purely Hebraic perspective, but the significant overlapping grammar between Psalm 93 and the Ugaritic material renders a Hebrew-constrained argument all but invalid.[53] Although it is tempting as a conservative Christian to forego any cultic overlap between Israel and their neighbors, maintaining such a thesis is almost impossible. Yet Sylva's comment that "there is no sense of divine struggle" in Psalm 93 is compelling and must be considered.[54]

Indeed, Sylva's comment is illustrative, for Yahweh's throne is already established, he is girded with majesty and strength, his house is firmly placed, and he is unequivocally mightier than the waves of chaos. Yet the very presence of the waters and the parallelism with Canaanite myth undeniably suggests that Psalm 93 follows the chaoskampf pattern exemplified in Psalm 29. The parallel literature of Canaan would almost certainly be in the minds of the exile generation due to the contextual factors. Therefore, one must conclude that

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[51] Ben C. Ollenburger, *Zion, The City of the Great King: A Theological Symbol of the Jerusalem Cult* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 25–33.

[52] Dennis Sylva, "The Rising נהרות of Psalm 93: Chaotic Order," *JSOT* 36.4 (2012): 471–82.

[53] For considerations on overlapping grammar, see Dahood, *Psalms II: 51-100*, 339–44.

[54] Sylva, "The Rising נהרות of Psalm 93: Chaotic Order," 474.

the psalmist's usage of the chaoskampf genre is polemical against the Canaanite gods. Whereas Baal struggled against Yam and subsequently became king, establishing his throne, Yahweh has never once engaged in struggle against the primordial waters in order to establish his kingship. As Tate writes,

> The emphasis in the Baal texts, as in the Babylonian Marduk texts, is upon the establishment of the power of divine kingship and the building of a temple for the victorious god…It would be inappropriate for a divine King to allow his house, a house which was rightfully his because of his victories over the Sea and the sea-monsters, to be so ill-treated.[55]

Thus the comparison makes clear that Yahweh is actually omnipotent while Baal must contend with others to become king. Sylva's point that there is no sense of divine struggle demonstrates that Yahweh never allowed his house or reign to be ill-treated. Instead, his reign was never challenged and never can be, for he is king forever. Therefore, the psalmist thus uses both the chaoskampf genre alongside the truth of Yahweh's eternal reign to reiterate the truth that Yahweh is the one true God. Even the overwhelming strength of the chaotic oceans are laughable before Yahweh who is king forever. As Calvin states, "though the world may to appearance be shaken with violent commotions, this argues no defect in the government of God, since he can control them at once by his dreadful power."[56]

The presentation of the chaoskampf also makes sense of the situation of the Israelites. It is highly likely, given the position in the Psalter, that the psalmist would be utilizing the very cultural myths that the exile generation were being steeped in. Whether Psalm 93's application to the exile generation is due to the work of the psalmist or the compiler, the application is nevertheless clear. At the very outset of the kingship Psalms, the exiles in

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[55] Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 254.

[56] John Calvin, *Psalms 93-150*, trans. Rev. James Anderson, vol. 4 of *Commentary on the Book of the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 9.

Babylon are given a polemic against Babylon's own gods. This would have been intended to strengthen faith in Yahweh and a resolve to not fall into worship of other gods. The exiles would have required numerous reminders of the power and trustworthiness of God. Thus the psalmist points to Yahweh as king over all false gods at the very outset of the kingship psalms.

Modern Application

As members of our own exilic community, not yet in our heavenly homeland, we ought to use Book IV of the Psalter to remind ourselves of the dangers of exile. While the Baal-Yam chaoskampf does not pervade the social imaginary, there are nevertheless religious stories and metanarratives that grip the culture, urging trust in money, the state, or the sovereign individual above God. The fact that these stories do not grip the imagination in the same way as Canaanite myth makes them all the more insidious. Yet the psalmist reminds us that Yahweh is God even over insidious cultural and cultic myths. Furthermore, the way in which to remove the power of those myths is to redefine one's relationship to them in light of God's triumph over their power. Yahweh is the one true God, so he has triumphed over Baal and is alone worthy of our worship. Yahweh has created all things, so money is a gift from him and must be used in such a way as to honor his decrees. Yahweh is sovereign over all, so our trust must be placed in him over the state. Yahweh defines right and wrong, so ethics are derivative from his character, not the character of the supposed sovereign individual.

Conclusion

The pervasive issue of Baal worship in the history of Israel results in numerous reminders, warnings, and rebukes throughout the OT. However, the modern reader must not be quick to cast spite upon the Israelites for their shortcomings, for the baals of today are worshipped all

the same. The psalmist of Psalm 93 provides the solution to this problem. Through polemical writing and utilization of the Canaanite chaoskampf genre, the psalmist provides a scathing remark against Baal-worshippers whilst making a case for the absolute sovereignty and holiness of Yahweh. This is a case that should be read time and again by the Christian, for it has much to teach the reader about their response to false idols. We must cling to Him over all else, for Yahweh is God over every insidious myth and evil lie that the enemy can muster.

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