

REGENT UNIVERSITY

PSALM 24

A RESEARCH PAPER SUBMITTED TO

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BY

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Psalm 24 reads:

- 1 The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.
2 For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods.
3 Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?
4 He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully...
9 Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.

Some scholars suggest that Psalm 24 is heterogeneous in character¹ – that is, the text holds no cohesive literary unison.² However, the author(s) of Psalm 24 delivers a surprisingly orchestrated but transient illustration of an Israelite temple procession.³ Moreover, this procession was once part of a larger worship structure that could be characterized as a New Year Festival.⁴ Therefore, I have chosen to evaluate Psalm 24:3-4, and also to reveal that the verses surrounding vv. 3-4 may have been intentionally structured to highlight the proper sequence of the Israelite New Year Festival.

One reason in determining whether this chapter is actually dealing with a New Year Festival procession is found in Psalm 24:3. It reads, “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?”⁵ The word hill translates into Hebrew as mountain, or har, and can be described in such terms as, “(5b) Mountain peaks were said to reach into the heavens where God dwells...(6) Since “mountains” were associated with deity (Is 14:13), God chose to make great revelations on “mountains”...(8) “Mountains” often serve as a symbol of strength (Zec 4:7) inasmuch as they carried mythological significance since many people thought of them as sacred areas.”⁶

¹ Oeming, *Das Buch der Psalmen: Psalm 1-41*.

² Goldingay, *Psalms*.

³ Duke, “Form and Meaning: Multi-Layered Balanced Thought Structure in Psalm 24:4.”

⁴ Goulder, “David and Yahweh in Psalms 23 and 24,” 472.

⁵ KJV, Psalm 24:3, 727.

⁶ Strong, *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, 71.

This exact hill in verse 3 is considered by some as a direct reference to King David and Solomon's temple.⁷ Likewise, temples were often at the center of New Year Festivals in the ancient Near East.⁸ In addition, the discovery of the tablets of Ras Sharma in 1929 played a pivotal role in determining whether or not Israel had any sort of creation/renewal New Year festival. German scholar Hermann Gunkel revealed that the Ras Shamra tablets were Ugaritic writings containing poetry with the same themes as the Psalms.⁹ These Ugaritic tablets are dated from 1500 to 1200 BC in Syria.¹⁰

Another reason relating to a temple procession/festival is found in Psalm 24:4, which reads, "He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully."¹¹ This portion of the processional festival suggests a theatrical drama where the temple priest responds to the Israelite king's question posed in verse 3. Moreover, the king would have been accompanied by the Ark of the Covenant and a choir that hung near the king who stood outside the temple entrance as part of the procession.¹² As the king stood at the entrance of the temple the king engaged in a question and answer session with the priest of the temple; however, the king perhaps represented all of Israel's worthy citizens.¹³ The basis of the questioning determined whether the earthly king was worthy to step foot in the holy precincts of God's holy temple.

If the king was proven worthy then the temple gate or door was opened, whereupon the earthy king was enthroned and received a blessing within the temple holy precinct called the

⁷ Adler, "The Historical Background of Psalm 24," 268-270.

⁸ Pongratz-Leisten, "Neujahr(sfest). B. Nach akkadischen Quellen," 294-298.

⁹ Goldingay and Wright, "'Yahweh Our God Yahweh One': The Oneness of God in the Old Testament," 44-45.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ KJV, Psalm 24:4, 727-728.

¹² Reifsnnyder, "Psalm 24," 284-288.

¹³ Sumpter, "The coherence of Psalms 15-24," 199-200.

Holy of Holies.¹⁴ This blessing can in part be in Psalm 24:9, which reads, "...the King of glory shall come in."¹⁵ Arguably the blessing resulted with God's presence entering into the temple along with the earthy king. During this juncture of the festival, I find it reasonable to wonder if the earthly king received the royal coronation name, i.e. Son, found back in Psalm 2.

Another festival clue that is less obvious is found back in the beginning verses in Psalm 24:1-2. These verses read, "1) The earth is the LORD's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. 2) For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods."¹⁶ The choir that trailed the king inside the temple gates may have been singing about mankind's primeval beginnings prior to the procession.¹⁷

Furthermore, the creation was to mark and symbolize a new beginning for Israel and was to be repeated yearly.¹⁸ Remarkably, creation accounts are common motifs found among Near Eastern texts. The Babylonian Akitu Festival involved a text called the Enuma Elish. It highlighted Marduk's victory over chaos and described his creational power and governance over earthly elements.

The Bible itself begins with a creational account (Genesis) which perhaps was a part of this exact New Year Festival. Moreover, creational power played a primary role in determining which God was deserving of worship. Ancient Near Eastern civilizations depended heavily on rain for vegetation and food, and the best way to prove that their local god was authentic was if God provided food and aid. Israel was no different in this respect from other agrarian

¹⁴ Reifsnyder, "Psalm 24," 285.

¹⁵ KJV, Psalm 24:9, 728.

¹⁶ KJV, Psalm 24:1-2, 727.

¹⁷ Reifsnyder, "Psalm 24," 284-288.

¹⁸ Thomasson, "Together is Sharing an Umbrella...", 540.

neighbors.¹⁹ Therefore, I find it reasonable to think that vv. 1-2 and 9 are appropriately arranged with vv. 3-4.

In summary, Psalm 24:3-4 and the surrounding verses in the Psalm are more homogenous in nature than perhaps people fully realize. Conversely, I think this perspective could also help in understanding the larger structure of the Israelite New Year Festival. Thus, I see the author's/authors' framing of Psalm 24 as a cohesive festival drama that involved a creation, procession, kingship and God's presence in the temple relating to God's covenant relationship with Israel.

¹⁹ Dion, "YHWH as Storm-god and Sun-god," 43-71.

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