

## UHI Research Database pdf download summary

### The Psalter, Worship, and Worldview

Grant, Jamie

*Published in:*

The Identity of Israel's God in Christian Scripture

*Publication date:*

2020

*The Document Version you have downloaded here is:*

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

### [Link to author version on UHI Research Database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Grant, J. (2020). The Psalter, Worship, and Worldview. In D. Collett, M. Elliott, M. Gignilliat, & E. Radner (Eds.), *The Identity of Israel's God in Christian Scripture: Essays in Honor of Christopher R. Seitz* (pp. 131-142). (Resources for Biblical Study; Vol. 96). SBL Press. <https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/pubs/0603102P-front.pdf>

#### **General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the UHI Research Database are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights:

- 1) Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the UHI Research Database for the purpose of private study or research.
- 2) You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- 3) You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the UHI Research Database

#### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at [RO@uhi.ac.uk](mailto:RO@uhi.ac.uk) providing details; we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

---

# The Psalter, Worship, and Worldview

Jamie A. Grant

## Introduction

A few years ago, I was asked to speak at an academic conference on worldview in the Old Testament. This led to an interesting conversation with a colleague who asked me what topic I was speaking on at the event. “Worldview in the Psalms,” I replied. “Oh, that shouldn’t take long ... surely, there is no such thing as *a worldview* in the Psalms?,” came the reply, initiating an interesting discussion.

The surprising aspect of this conversation is that my colleague is a card-carrying Dooyeweerdian with strong Kuyperian tendencies.<sup>1</sup> His frame of reference thoroughly affirms the inescapable reality of a hermeneutical worldview that shapes our basic thinking about the most fundamental aspects of life and human experience. Why therefore the skepticism regarding the presence of worldview in the Psalms?<sup>2</sup>

---

I am grateful to Professor Seitz for his contribution to my PhD studies at the University of Gloucestershire as my second supervisor. While Chris may not remember this, I remain grateful for his always positively critical input.

1. The classic statement of Kuyper’s neo-Calvinist worldview would be found in his famous Stone Lectures delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1898 (Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008]). Perhaps the best introduction to Dooyeweerd would be Roy Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality: An Essay on the Hidden Role of Religious Belief in Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005). In terms of the man himself, the classic statement of his view on worldview for life would be found in his four-volume magnum opus, Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, trans. David Hugh Freeman, 4 vols. (Toronto: Paideia, 1984).

2. Some modern commentators critique the idea of worldview, particularly in its Reformed theological expression, as being overly cerebral and insufficiently formative

### Basic and Complex Worldview

I have to confess that my first thoughts on the topic assigned to me for that conference were, in some ways, similar. My initial reaction was to wonder whether we can legitimately talk about a worldview that is sourced in the Psalter alone. Or is worldview a reality that can only be constructed from the complex formulation of multiple principles drawn from the whole counsel of Scripture combined with those philosophical concepts that are frequently grouped together into the dogmatic category of prolegomena? In other words, is it at all legitimate to talk about a worldview *from* the Psalms or, by extension, from any other individual book of the Bible?

It is important to carefully define our terminology. Worldview can be either basic or complex. A complex worldview will seek to apply one's most basic presuppositions consistently across every aspect of life and societal interaction—from questions of personal integrity to perspectives on the arts, science, commerce, politics, and so on. A basic worldview is driven by a governing maxim or thought that, although broadly defined, has implications for every aspect of being, activity, and ethics.<sup>3</sup> What we find in the Psalter may be described as a *basic* worldview but one with far-reaching consequences.

In terms of biblical example, the idea of covenant may be an appropriate allusion to illustrate the difference between complex and basic worldview. On one level, covenant is a complex concept that indicates a thoroughly structured relationship that is governed by a multilayered written code (e.g., suzerain-vassal treaties as exemplified in second-millennial Hittite formulas, seventh-century Assyrian texts, or in the book of Deuteronomy).<sup>4</sup> On another level, however, covenant is nothing more

---

of character and behavior. See, e.g., James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009). I actually have much sympathy with Smith's perspective and would argue that a psalmic take on worldview actually addresses some of his central critiques.

3. The rise in the use of mission statements is indicative of the importance of this kind of basic worldview. Internet giant Google for many years operated, at least unofficially, under the most basic premise: "Don't be evil"—a simple, yet far-reaching idea.

4. See, e.g., Rolf Rendtorff, *The Covenant Formula: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation*, trans. Margaret Kohl, OTS (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), for discussion of some of the complexities of form; or see Kenneth A. Kitchen and Paul J. N. Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East*, 3 vols. (Wiesbaden:

than a promissory relationship (“I will be your God and you will be my people”).<sup>5</sup> Just as the idea of covenant can refer to a construct of relationship that is either basic or complex, in the same way, it can be argued that the concept of worldview may be either basic or complex and that it is possible to formulate what might be described as a basic worldview from the Psalms.<sup>6</sup>

Further, I would want to suggest, that it is desirable to seek out and hear the voice of the Psalms as a theological and philosophical construct designed to shape the universal perspectives of its readers. Basic worldview statements are particularly powerful because of the need to apply them to every aspect of daily life. Google employees, at least in theory, are forced to ask themselves the question each and every day: “What does it mean not to be evil?” Projects are meant to be analyzed in these terms and profits are meant to be secondary to this primary motivation. It is the broad and generic nature of the maxim that forces a questioning attitude that seeks application in real terms. Equally, the contextless and indeterminate nature of psalmody (including its central worldview maxims) forces an enquiring attitude that seeks a process of thinking through avenues

---

Harrassowitz, 2012), for discussion of historical development and the particular characteristics of the various types of covenant formulation.

5. “That Yhwh is Israel’s God, and Israel Yhwh’s people is one of the central statements in the Old Testament. It is expressed in a variety of linguistic forms. Among these one characteristic phrase, almost formula-like in character, stands out clearly: ‘I will be God for you and you shall be a people for me’” (Rendtorff, *Covenant Formula*, 11).

6. This issue of the necessary descriptive extent of a worldview is one of the critiques often leveled against N. T. Wright’s presentation of the topic in *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress; London: SPCK, 1992), 121–44. Some suggest that his four questions are not sufficiently comprehensive and wide-ranging to describe a worldview (cf. Sire’s seven—or eight, depending on how you look at it—questions for worldview formulation in James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalogue*, 5th ed. [Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2010]). However, I would want to argue that greater detail is not necessarily the best way to secure the most wide-ranging understanding or application of worldview. For further discussion on worldviews complex and basic, see Naugle’s consideration of J. Edwin Orr’s and Kuyper’s early explanations of worldview as a concept. Orr sought a coherent “Christian view” of all things (complex) whereas the ramifications of Kuyper’s worldview are equally far-reaching, despite the fact that they were simply based in the claim of Christ’s lordship (“Mine!”) (David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], 4–32).

of application to the current reader's setting.<sup>7</sup> Hence, the desirability of basic worldviews. Codices—exhaustive statements in terms of extent and intended application—struggle to keep up with changing circumstances, whereas foundational maxims constantly drive new applications in an ever-changing world. There is an inclusive power to the “don't be evil” statement that outstrips the value of a dozen corporate policy documents.<sup>8</sup>

The Psalm's basic but profound worldview can be described in two words: יהוה מלך. Or, to be more precise, I suspect that the psalmists would want to formulate this basic worldview using two key terms expressed in four Hebrew words: יהוה מלך (“Yahweh reigns”) and לעולם חסדו (“his love endures forever”).<sup>9</sup> This combination of beliefs—the absolute sovereignty of God and his relational goodness—results in a particular way of seeing and interacting with the world that is unique to the Hebrew experience in the ancient Near East. The message of the Psalms, in that typically terse manner associated with Hebrew poetry, formulates a way of seeing, understanding and interacting with the cosmos that is absolutely foundational to the thought world of the Old Testament believing community.<sup>10</sup>

7. Jamie A. Grant, “Determining the Indeterminate: Issues in Interpreting the Psalms,” *Southeastern Theological Review* 1 (2010): 3–14.

8. Speaking of the power of maxims, Hildebrandt writes, “The proverbial genre is paradoxical. Proverbs are simple, concrete, and mundane and, at the same time, profound, abstract, and transcendent. Their meanings are singular and particular, yet multifaceted and universal.” (Ted A. Hildebrandt, “Proverb,” in *Cracking Old Testament Codes: A Guide to the Literary Genres of the Old Testament*, ed. D. Brent Sandy and Ronald L. Giese Jr. [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995], 233).

9. See W. Dennis Tucker Jr. and Jamie A. Grant, *Psalms*, vol. 2, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 373–74; and Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51–100*, trans. Linda M. Maloney, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 448, for discussion of the translation options for יהוה מלך. Tucker helpfully described the dynamic of לעולם חסדו in his consideration of Ps 136: “The speaker confesses the *work* of God and the people confess the *faithfulness* of God. The two cannot be easily separated, nor should they be. One informs the other. The faithfulness of God is made evident in his activity, and his activity demonstrates his faithfulness.” (Tucker and Grant, *Psalms*, 889, emphasis original).

10. The question of a center to the Psalter is, of course, a tricky one. The themes of the Psalms are many and varied and any attempt to encompass the totality of the book in a single phrase (or even in these paired phrases) is entirely unrealistic. I make, below, an argument from canonical shape to emphasize the structural significance of these dual themes but it is not my intention either to universalize these premises or to suggest that their voice drowns out all others. Interestingly, I remember attending a

Foundational arguments are inevitably circular. Yahweh reigns and loves his people, so: (1) The ways of the universal King are properly basic and are ingrained in the cosmos;<sup>11</sup> (2) his revealed instruction (תורה) reflects his ways and provides *the* authoritative guide for his people; (3) Yahweh's people are to live torah-shaped lives because this instruction reflects his priorities and values (ingrained in the cosmos) and their desire is to live with the grain of the King's creational norms and expectations.<sup>12</sup> As James Mays points out, the ideology of Yahweh's divine sovereignty is not only a theological premise but is actually a construct of reality:

The coherence and reference of the psalmic language world is based on a sentence upon which all that is said in the psalms depends. Everything else is connected to what this one sentence says. It is a liturgical cry that is both a declaration of faith and a statement about reality.... Whatever else is said in the psalms about God and God's way with the world and human beings is rooted in the meaning and truth of this metaphor. It is systemic for psalmic language.... The declaration "the Lord reigns"

session on the Psalms at an Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, where the question of a theological center to the Psalms was discussed. The three Presbyterians on the panel all focused on "the Lord reigns" as the central theme, whereas the one (isolated, but apparently quite happy) Lutheran chose the theme of Yahweh's love enduring forever. Their opinions would probably be a fair reflection of the scholarly literature regarding the dominant theological themes of the Psalter.

11. See Ps 19:1–3 or Ps 96:6. This is emphasized in the language of the torah-synonym קח ("decree") with its connotations of the divine decree being "engraved" or "ingrained," sometimes into the created order as well as written texts (cf. Job 28:26; Prov 28:29). See *HALOT*, s.v. "קח."

12. Mays is helpful here: "As sovereign, Yhwh orders the lives of his people. The instrument of this ordering is named variously his law, decrees, statutes, precepts, commandments, ordinances, covenant, and word. By these various forms of the will of the LORD, his people learn and are directed into his ways and paths. Yhwh's dominion over the floods guarantees the certainty of his decrees (94:5). Like Yhwh's throne and the earth, his precepts are established forever and ever (111:7–8). The God whose word directs his people is the same God whose word brought forth the world (33:6–9) and directs what happens in it (147:15–19). Yhwh's law is sign and confirmation of his royal activity for and with his people. Exodus, wilderness, and settlement in the land have their consummation in a people who keep his statutes (105:45; 78:1–8). His ordinances are his unique gift to Israel, which distinguishes them from any other nation (147:19–20). His kingdom rules over all, and his steadfast love is from everlasting to everlasting on those who keep his covenant (103:17–19)" (James L. Mays, *The Lord Reigns* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994], 19–20).

involves a vision of reality that is the theological center of the Psalter. The cosmic and worldly action to which it refers is the aetiology of the psalmic situation. The psalmic understanding of the people of God, the city of God, the king of God and the law of God depends on its validity and implications. The psalmic functions of praise, prayer and instruction are responses to it.<sup>13</sup>

So the יהוה מלך (Yahweh-*malak*) maxim presents a basic but ultimately, via the broad significance of torah, wide-ranging worldview that both confronts and shapes the believer's perspective on everything. The arch example of the significance of this simple metaphor is, perhaps, best seen in Ps 2. Israel's historical experience seldom, if ever, reflected the geo-political realities communicated in this enthronement psalm. However, Ps 2 presents the believing community with a lens—a view of the world—through which they must always parse the surrounding national and international political realities. Regardless of how things appeared at any given point in history, the ultimate foundational reality that was to shape the Israelite perception of the world is that Yahweh reigns over it via his chosen king enthroned in Zion, just as he himself is enthroned in heaven. This is a worldview designed to impact every aspect of Israelite cognizance and praxis—“Because our God reigns we will see the world in a particular way and act accordingly, regardless of any and all contrary circumstances.”<sup>14</sup>

#### The Yahweh-*Malak* Worldview

So, how might this Yahweh-*malak* worldview be described in more exegetical detail? Obviously, this is a theme so extensive in the Psalms that a comprehensive study is beyond the scope of a single article. The inadequate compromise proposed here is to take a brief look at the beginning, middle, and end of the Psalter to unpack this worldview encompassed by the combined maxims “Yahweh מלך” and “his love endures forever.”

13. Mays, *Lord Reigns*, 6, 22.

14. This should not be seen as a simplistic fideism, however. This is, rather, a spiritual and eschatological long view of things recognizing that the divine hand in creation is often hidden (or at least deeply mysterious) to human eyes.

## Psalms 1–2: The Introduction

Psalms 1 and 2 provide the reader with a construct of reality that encapsulates the psalmic worldview.<sup>15</sup> Psalm 2 is typical of the many statements of divine kingship that are found in the Psalter. The world rebels but Yahweh rules from heaven and through his anointed/king/son, therefore, all of humanity should respond in obedient worship.<sup>16</sup> This rule image is combined with Ps 1 through the *אשרי* *inclusio* and variety of lexical and thematic links.<sup>17</sup> The first psalm calls on the reader to choose the way in which they will walk—the way of Yahweh via a reflective torah-shaped life or the way of the wicked that ultimately perishes.<sup>18</sup> So the worldview of the introduction points to an absolute divine rule, regardless of appearances, that is met by a lifestyle of whole-life, torah-flavored worship.

## Psalms 93–100: The Pivot

It is, indeed, a bit of a jump to move from Ps 2 to Ps 93, but a canonical approach to the Psalter provides some justification for this interpretative move.<sup>19</sup> Book 4 is often described as the pivot of the Psalter, the perspective-bringing response to the escalating sense of crisis that runs throughout

15. See J. Clinton McCann, *A Theological Introduction to the Books of Psalms: The Psalms as Torah* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993).

16. See David M. Howard Jr., “Divine and Human Kingship as Organizing Motifs in the Psalter,” in *The Psalms: Language for All the Seasons of the Soul*, ed. Andrew J. Schmutzer and David M. Howard Jr. (Chicago: Moody, 2013), 197–207.

17. See Jamie A. Grant, *The King as Exemplar: The Function of Deuteronomy’s Kingship Law in the Shaping of the Book of Psalms*, AcBib 17 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 41–69.

18. Wenham comments: “Psalm 1 sets the agenda for the Psalter by dividing mankind into two categories: the righteous, who keep the law and inherit God’s blessing, and the wicked, who suffer destruction. These two groups of people keep reappearing in the subsequent psalms.... Also prominent in Psalm 1 is the joy of studying the Torah and its positive benefits for those who do. This emphasis on obeying the law appears elsewhere in Book 1 of the Psalter” (Gordon J. Wenham, *Psalms as Torah: Reading Biblical Song Ethically*, STI [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012], 34–35).

19. Gerald H. Wilson, “The Structure of the Psalter,” in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, ed. Philip S. Johnston and David G. Firth (Leicester: Apollos, 2005), 229–46.



books 1–3.<sup>20</sup> The Yahweh-*malak* collection (Pss 93–100) lies at the heart of book 4, which is the interpretative heart of the book of Psalms.<sup>21</sup> It is important, here, to note the (most likely) postexilic historical setting of book 4. A collection gathered in the period following Judah’s demise and underwhelming renewal focuses on this strong statement of divine rule regardless of all the evidence to the contrary. The trappings of covenant (land, city, temple, king) are all removed, “Yet Yahweh still reigns,” the psalmists declare. This is *the* fundamental perspective for the people of God regardless of any and all indications to the contrary.<sup>22</sup> The behavioral response to that worldview is one of worship and covenant fealty (e.g., Ps 95) but it is also one that calls upon others to recognize the lordship of Yahweh and to join the community of worship (Pss 96–99). There are, it is clear, both worshipful and missional implications to be derived from a Yahweh-*malak* worldview.<sup>23</sup>

#### Psalms 146–150: The Logical Conclusion

The imagery of the *Laudate Dominum* is thoroughly grounded in the inevitable creational response of praise to the kingship of Yahweh. Interestingly, this collection is replete with the height images of kingship (Pss 146:10; 147:5, 15–18; 148:5–12; etc.) but also with metaphors emphasizing the imminence, approach, and intimacy of Yahweh (146:6–9; 147:2–6; 149:4, etc.).<sup>24</sup> The combination of images in this closing doxology reminds

20. See, e.g., Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, SBLDS 76 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 214–15; and Michael G. McKelvey, *Moses, David and the High Kingship of Yahweh: A Canonical Study of Book IV of the Psalter*, Gorgias Dissertations Biblical Studies 55 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2010).

21. See David M. Howard Jr., *The Structure of Psalms 93–100*, BJSUCSD 5 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997).

22. As indicated above by Mays.

23. See Jamie A. Grant, “Creation and Kingship: Environment and Witness in the Yahweh *Mālāk* Psalms,” in *As Long as Earth Endures: The Bible, Creation and the Environment*, ed. Jonathan Moo and Robin Routledge (Nottingham: Apollos, 2014), 92–106.

24. E.g., Zenger comments on Ps 148: “The theological concept of the psalm, according to which the whole creation is called to praise YHWH because of the order he has ordained ... rests primarily on ... the YHWH-is-king Psalms 93–100, especially the two closely related Psalms 96 and 98” (Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101–150*, trans. Linda M. Maloney, Hermeneia

the reader both of Yahweh's rule (יהוה מלך) and of his great covenant love (לעולם הסדור). The scope of praise is all-creational, pointing the singer again to the ingrained order of the divine purpose in creation. There is a creational way of things and these psalms remind us that this is to be found in bowing the knee to the lordship of Yahweh the King who draws near to guarantee his love and justice on this earth.

So the content of the psalmic worldview is that Israel's God reigns absolutely and the ramifications of that rule should be outworked in a worshipful, missional, justice-seeking, whole-life response of torah-shaped praise.

### The Psalms and Worldview Formation

One of the complex aspects of any discussion of worldview is the foundational nature of the entity itself.<sup>25</sup> For a worldview to be properly described as such it must be so ingrained that its holder is almost unaware of its existence and influence on his or her perspectives. Engaging with the work of Mary Douglas, Richard Fardon suggests that "we (regardless of who 'we' are) experience the world on the basis of already held categories."<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, there is an intellectual and moral challenge that every human must face: How consistent are we with our own worldview? Worldview is so basic to us that we seldom consciously consider it.<sup>27</sup> This can, of course,

---

[Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011], 632). Zenger, again, on Ps 146, "Vv. 7–9 ... show him ... as the good king who accomplishes the order of justice and life that he has bestowed on his world and keeps it in motion." (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 3, 614). See also the helpful article from Walter Brueggemann, "Bounded by Obedience and Praise," *JSTOT* 50 (1991): 63–92.

25. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines worldview as: "n. [after German *Weltanschauung* n.] a set of fundamental beliefs, values, etc., determining or constituting a comprehensive outlook on the world; a perspective on life" ("worldview, n.," *OED Online*). Wolters describes worldview as "the comprehensive framework of one's basic belief about things" (Al Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005], 2).

26. Richard Fardon, *Mary Douglas: An Intellectual Biography* (London: Routledge, 1999), 87.

27. As Sire points out, worldview is "a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true, or entirely false) which we hold (*consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently*) about the basic construction of reality, and

lead to practical inconsistencies. It is possible for us *not to live* in accordance with our worldview. When challenged, we will defend it, but in daily reality we can often fail to allow our basic presuppositions to confront our life praxis.

Herein lies the power of the constant psalmic reminder that Yahweh is King and that his love endures forever. The songs sung, the poems recited, the metaphors considered actively remind the covenant community of their deepest underpinning beliefs and call on that community to live their lives in a manner that accords with their creed. Singing and reciting the Psalms is a practice of deep-seated worldview inculcation. Gordon Wenham, in fact, argues that “the Psalter is a sacred text that *is intended to be memorized*.”<sup>28</sup>

Yahweh *malak*; therefore:

- we will devote ourselves to living torah-informed lives (Ps 1);
- we will serve Yahweh regardless of the surrounding climate (Ps 2);
- we will respond in glad worship (Ps 97);
- we will call on the nations to join us in this worship (Pss 96, 98, 100);
- we will not stray as our fathers did (Ps 95);
- we will walk in prayerful holiness (Ps 99);
- we will uphold the cause of the needy (Ps 146);
- we will trust in his power not human ability (Ps 147);
- we will join with all of creation in singing his worthy praise (Pss 148–150).

The Psalms force the community of faith to confront the logical consequences of their basic presuppositions—if our God is King, then to that end psalmody provides us with a powerful reminder of the formative nature of worldview.<sup>29</sup> For a worldview to be worthy of its name, it must influence more than our cognition—it must influence our character and

---

that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being” (Sire, *Universe Next Door*, 15, emphasis added).

28. Wenham, *Psalms as Torah*, 41, emphasis added. Wenham goes on to argue that communal signing gives the psalms “even more power than when they are merely recited. But even mere recitation ... is ... a more powerful instructor than listening to stories, commands, or wisdom sayings. Listening is passive—indeed, the listener can ignore the message—but recitation and, especially, singing are activities that involve the whole person and cannot be honestly undertaken without real commitment to what is being said or sung” (55).

29. See Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966); and Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*:

behavior.<sup>30</sup> The psalmic call to acknowledge that יהוה מלך reminds the people that there are character and behavioral consequences of their underlying beliefs—he reigns, therefore, his instruction is not notional. The Psalms’s refrain that לעולם חסדו reminds us that Yahweh’s rule is one of love not tyranny and that our response should be motivated by love not obligation.

So, in short, the constant poetic repetition of the basics of the Hebrew worldview foregrounds presuppositions and forces the people to incorporate their most foundational beliefs into every aspect of their life practice. This is the significance of basic worldview statements: they draw the adherent into a constant process of reflective recontextualization in every circumstance.

#### The Medium of Worldview Communication

Briefly, in conclusion, it would be remiss of me not to say something about the medium of worldview communication and lifestyle formation in the Psalms. In short, songs are powerful. Shared testimony shapes lives and attitudes in a way that a treatise cannot.<sup>31</sup> There is something about sacrament that forms our being in a way that sermon simply cannot achieve (and I say that as a Scottish Presbyterian with a high view of preaching).

The challenge of the psalms with regard to worldview is also a pedagogical challenge for the contemporary church and academy. Is our teaching too closely linked to dry narrative? Do we fail to realize the power of poetry, song and ritual?<sup>32</sup>

However, we cannot ignore the fact that, in the Psalter, ontology is presented in poetry, theology is shaped by song, creeds are recited in praise,

---

*An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), for more on the shaping of individuals through shared worldviews.

30. See Wenham’s interesting chapter on “The Unique Claims of Prayed Ethics” in *Psalms as Torah*, 57–76. Excessive cognitivism is a critique that is frequently leveled against the classic descriptions of worldview. This is one of the key points that Smith makes in *Desiring the Kingdom*.

31. “The Psalter’s poetic form, musical directions, historical retellings, theological and ethical instructions—all of these suggest that it would have served the purpose of ‘enculturation’ very effectively” (Wenham, *Psalms as Torah*, 56).

32. I offer these rhetorical questions as a challenge to the reader, but you will note that I have chosen not to write this paper in epic verse, iambic pentameter, or sonnet form.

and worldview is formulated through the metaphors of ritual and worship. Modernism has done harm to our understanding of “teaching,” and we need to liberate our sense of artifice again if we are to shape worldview in the ways of the Psalms. For some of us, in our church settings, this will mean revisiting the role of song, sacrament, and ritual within our congregations to make sure that they have the place that they deserve. For others, it will mean revisiting the role of song, sacrament, and ritual to make sure that they have the meaning that they deserve.

### Conclusion

In short, the Psalms provide us with a worldview that is basic in its formulation but all-encompassing in its scope—Yahweh is the true and loving King and that has consequences for all of humanity. For the people of God, these consequences impact our desires, our personal piety, our community worship, our mission. They should influence our view of politics, commerce, aesthetics, social justice, the arts, and so on. The combined fact that Yahweh is King and that his love endures forever has profound implications that should shape the way in which we think about and engage with the world around us.

Is this not the very essence of worldview?