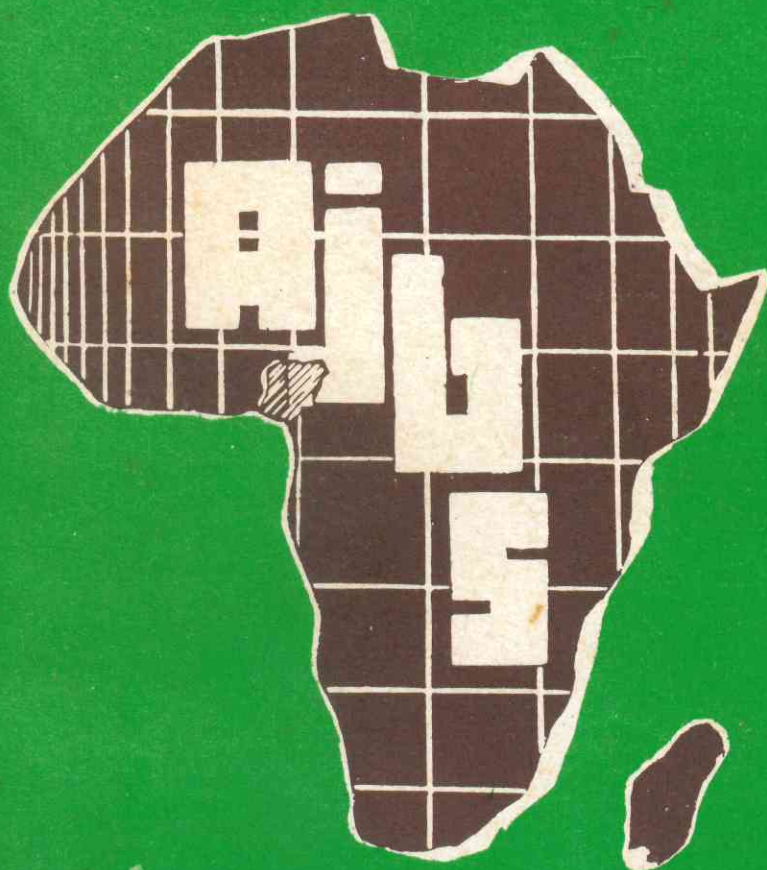


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- (6) Providing useful source material for research and teaching Biblical studies in Africa.
- (7) Providing up-to-date information on new developments in Biblical research, both in Africa and elsewhere.

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Book reviews, adverts of new books, conferences, research notes and Ph.D. thesis titles are also welcome.

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CURRENT BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS IN AFRICA

By

Rt. Rev. Dr. John Onaiyekan

Introduction:

It is for me a great honour to be invited to deliver the key-note address at this annual conference of the NABIS. In addition, it gives me great joy to be able to be among you, after many years of absence due to my new pastoral engagements as a bishop. I congratulate NABIS for keeping the flag flying all these years, despite the difficulties and challenges of the present and recent past. May the Lord continue to sustain you in your efforts.

1. The theme of your conference raises a couple of questions - the answers to which we hope will be supplied in the course of this conference. Here, I merely wish to spell out some of these questions by way of opening up the discussion. A "key-note address", I believe, is supposed to "open" the gate of discussion.
2. Perhaps the primary question has to do with the concept of "hermeneutics". In recent times, this has become a vast field

*A Keynote Address to the Nigerian Association of Biblical Studies - (NABIS)
Annual Conference: Jos, July 12, 2000*

on its own, with relevance well beyond Sacred Scripture. Today, we hear of "hermeneutics" in theology, historiography, political science, sociology etc. But I believe the bottom line has to do with the idea of "interpreting": the bible in the case of "biblical hermeneutics". We would expect to hear in this conference a bit on what the task of interpreting the bible is all about.

3. The Bible is - or to be more accurate, contains - the Word of God. The word of God is everlasting. If so, in what sense can one talk of a *current* hermeneutics. Is the bible and its message not always current - in every age and time?
4. Similar to the above question is that relating to the reference to *Africa*. Is there a specific kind of hermeneutics in Africa, different from what obtains elsewhere? If so, what is the basis of this difference and in what does it consist? In other words, can we talk really of an "African Hermeneutics", European, Asian? If so what about Yoruba, Ibo or Tiv hermeneutics? What are the limits of such distinctions?
5. In searching for the answers to the above questions, one would expect a good attention to certain issues about the nature of the biblical text itself.
 - a. The bible is the final result of a *long process*. It is indeed the Word of God to humanity. But it is a Word of God that has passed through many stages. We hear the word of God through a complex set of documents: history, poetry, prophetic utterances, state archives etc. The material is addressed to a definite

audience, mainly orally at first and later in writing. The origin of this material covers centuries. The Bible, the final result of this long process owes its authenticity to the action of the Holy Spirit - a process that in theological jargon is often called "inspiration." Surely, all the above cannot but affect the way we interpret the sacred books.

We should note here the major difference between the perception which the Christian has about his scriptures and the way we hear Muslims perceive their Qur'an. There is hardly any meaningful parallel beyond the fact that they are both considered "holy books". I am sure many of you have experienced the deep frustration of attempting a dialogue with Muslims on this matter especially when they venture to interpret the bible for us according to their idea of the "holy book". I imagine we cause them similar frustration when we try to interpret the Qur'an as if it was the bible.

- b There is a whole series of issues relating to the later history of the *text* after its being committed to writing. St. John tells us why there is any written bible at all:

"There were many other signs that Jesus worked in the sight of the disciples, but they are not recorded in this book. These are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing this you may have life through his name. Jn. 20:30-31.

It is clear therefore that the Bible does not exhaust God's discourse with humanity. If everything were written down, says John, "*I do not suppose the world itself would hold all the books that would be*

written. Jn 21:25.

Of course, the concern of this Conference is the written inspired word: *Biblical hermeneutics*. But the inspired text cannot be fully interpreted in isolation, it has to be interpreted within the context of a faith community. This too is under the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

We need to attend also to the fact that for most people, the sacred text reaches the reader through a series of versions and translations. The Holy Spirit has to be busy at every stage of text selection and translation. Many who glibly proclaim: "The bible says" - reading from a book are often oblivious of the complexity of the process we are referring to here.

- c The Bible is meant to be accessible to all who read or listen to it with faith. But we also know that not all of the Bible is immediately accessible. St. Peter already remarked about the difficulty of interpreting correctly certain sections of scripture - his particular reference was to some of the points made by St. Paul on the doctrine of justification, but he says that his warning is applicable to the rest of scripture.

"In all his letters there are of course some passages which are hard to understand and these are the ones that uneducated and unbalanced people distort, in the same way as they distort the rest of scripture - to their own destruction. 2 Peter 3:16.

Therefore, the task of interpreting the sacred Book will remain always urgent and necessary.

- d. I believe there are at least 2 aspects to hermeneutics:
 - What the Bible is saying
 - What it is saying to me, to us, in the here and now.

i. What is the bible saying in its text? This would stress the perennial message in its universality the objective context. This is the first task, to determine what the text is actually saying. This cuts across all times, places and circumstances. It is the basis for whatever is done with the text. This is the area of cooperation, internationally and interdenominationally. In this area, on the scientific level, a lot of progress has been made to the extent that we hardly talk any more of Catholic or protestant biblical studies. This too is a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church of our generation.

ii, What is the bible saying to me here and now? This is the appropriate domain of contextual hermeneutics. This is where we can talk of "current" and "African" hermeneutics. It is here that we must address the issue of being relevant to the needs of our people: applying the sacred text to the circumstances of their daily lives, in the context of a faith community. This presupposes a careful attention to the realities around us. God speaks to his own under all circumstances.

The burden of the African exegete would be to examine the word of God and apply its message to the realities of the here and now. And this is not only in our distress but also in our joys, in short to guide us aright.

- 6. On a final note, we need to find a way of listening to - and documenting - what our people are hearing from the scriptures. If the Holy Spirit is the main interpreter of the

THE PSALTER AND ITS HERMENEUTICS IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT.

By

REVD. DR. CALEB O. OGUNKUNLE

Introduction

The Psalter occupies a unique position in the third division of the Hebrew Canon. Jesus referred to it as representing this third division of the canon when he said "The Law of Moses, the Prophets, the Psalms." (Luke 24: 44, cf. 2 Mac. 2: 13; Col. 3:15.) In recognition of this uniqueness of the Psalter in the Hebrew Canon, a lot of research work has been carried out on it by many scholars in the West.¹ Some have made efforts to spell out some hermeneutical principles to be adopted in the investigation and interpretation of the psalms². The growing interest in the interpretation of the psalter among Western scholars, is reflected in the fact that it constituted the main topic of investigation by the Society of Biblical Literature during their 1989 Annual Meeting. They came up with nine essays on the interpretation of the psalms in a book titled *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*³

Although the Psalter is one of the most widely read books of the Bible among African Christians, it is surprising that not much has been done on it by African biblical scholars. This constitutes a big challenge to African biblical scholars in the third Millennium. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to examine the Psalter and its position in the Hebrew Canon; review some works done on the Psalter by Western biblical scholars and African church leaders; and to suggest some hermeneutical principles that might help African biblical scholars in the interpretation of the Psalter. The paper will conclude with the illustration of the suggested African hermeneutical principles as discovered in psalm 3. It is assumed that our discussion on the hermeneutical principles of the Psalter will be applicable to

the rest of the Old Testament books in particular and the whole bible in general.

I. The Psalter and its position in the Hebrew Canon.

The word Psalter originally referred to a stringed instrument but later it came to mean a 'collection of songs', and the word was used in the Codex Alexandrinus as the title of the Book of psalms.⁴ The Psalter is like a hymnbook, comprising 150 Psalms, written by different people like David, Moses, Asaph, Solomon, etc. over a vast period of time of about 1000 years.

The Psalter belongs to the third division of the Hebrew Canon and it occupies a unique position in the section. This position of the Psalter in the Hebrew Canon has however generated a heated debate among biblical scholars. In fact, it has been rightly remarked that "the position of the Psalter in the Hebrew canon presents a perplexing picture in the various areas of text tradition."⁵

Among ancient manuscripts, the Psalter is found placed at different positions. In the Talmud, for instance, the Book of Ruth is placed before the psalms because of the theory that the book gave the genealogy of David. In the Spanish manuscripts, Chronicles is placed before the Book of Psalms. In our English versions, the Book of Psalms follows Job, as in the Septuagint, on the basis that Job, with its patriarchal setting, ought to precede David's Psalms.⁶ But then, wherever the Psalter is positioned in the Bible, the fact remains that it occupies a very unique position in the Holy writ. The fact that the Hebrew Bible places the Psalms first among the books of the Writings shows its importance in the section.

II. Review of Some Works on the Psalter

One prominent scholar on the Psalter is Hermann Gunkel.⁷ In

his study he departed from the traditional approach of the individual study of the Psalms according to their various types and looked into the question of their date and authorship. Although Gunkel recognized the validity of historical criticism as a legitimate tool, he was convinced that it failed to answer many of the questions often raised in the Bible and by modern readers. Gunkel was interested in writing a history of Israel's literature in which historical criticism could not help much, as it could not provide any trustworthy chronological ordering of the materials.⁸ He therefore, proposed a new approach that was more consistent with the Hebrew manner of speech and culture. Gunkel, in his method argues that it is the task of the historian to isolate the individual literary unit by determining its beginning and ending; identifying its type or genre by observing its formal characteristics, style, mode of composition, terminology, and rhetorical features tracing the origin of the story, and then looking at the occasion in which the kind of speech was employed.⁹

With this approach, he was able to give a new direction to biblical research, instill vitality into it and rescue it from mere craftsmanship and finally opening fresh vistas for our grasp and interpretation of the individual literary units. He was able to identify five main categories, namely, hymns, community laments, Thanksgiving songs of the individual, spiritual laments of the individual, and mixed types in his reading and interpretation of the Psalms.¹⁰ Most importantly, having established the fact that Psalms are liturgical poetry, for they had their origin in the cult, he made it clear that a critical work and interpretation on the Psalter cannot be done in isolation. Rather he claims it must be with a good understanding of other hymns in the Old Testament and other extra biblical materials such as the Apocryphal books, and the Babylonian and Egyptian songs.¹¹

Closely related to the work of Hermann Gunkel is Sigmund Mowinckel who authored *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*.¹²

Mowinckel was a student of Hermann Gunkel and he built upon the work of his teacher. Just like his teacher, his form-critical approach led him to conclude that the psalms are totally cultic both in origin and intention.¹³ Perhaps his greatest contribution lies in his argument that in ancient Israel, there existed, in association with the Jerusalem Temple, an annual autumnal New Year Festival at which Yahweh's enthronement as King was celebrated.¹⁴ Therefore, Mowinckel argues strongly that every Psalm in the Psalter has a cultic origin and it is this cultic origin of the Psalms that must provide the framework for the interpretation of each of the Psalms.¹⁵

One of the most notable works that has helped in the interpretation of the Psalter was carried out by Claus Westermann in *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*.¹⁶ He rested his case on two arguments. One, that there is no word for 'thanks' because the Hebrew word *toda* means praise. Secondly, that Gunkel's treatment of the hymns was defective in that it failed to define what a hymn was. Westermann argues that 'hymn' and 'Thanksgiving' belong to the same category and that no sharp distinction should be made between the two. Therefore, he called the Psalm of praise 'descriptive praise' that is, praising God for His action and being; while the Psalm of Thanksgiving he called 'narrative or confessional praise' that is, praising God for specific actions.¹⁷ Westermann's hermeneutical principle is very unique in that he was able to use the concept of 'praise and lament' to interpret each of the Psalms in the Psalter as well as songs of the Babylonians and Egyptians.¹⁸

The hermeneutical principle of Arno Clement Gaebelein for the psalter as contained in his book titled *The Book of Psalms; A Devotional and Prophetic Commentary* sounds captivating and fascinating.¹⁹ He points out that the 150 Psalms in the Psalter are "Songs of praise, prayers, description of every possible kind of human experience."²⁰ He also states that the Jewish Synagogue used

the Psalter largely in its rituals while the individual Jew used the book for both devotion and worship. He further notes that the Christian Church too has been using the Psalter extensively.²¹ Perhaps his greatest contribution to the interpretation of the Psalter is his strong link of the five books of the Psalter with the five books of Moses, the Pentateuch. In other words, he argues that the five books of the law given by Moses to Israel correspond to the five books given by David to Israel in the psalter. According to him, Genesis corresponds to psalms 1-41; Exodus corresponds to Psalms 42-72; Leviticus corresponds to psalms 73-89; Numbers corresponds to Psalms 90-106; and Deuteronomy corresponds to psalms 107-150. It is with this method of understanding that he interpreted each of the Psalms in the Psalter. Gaebelein, in his conservatism and dispensationalism made a sharp distinction between the Old and New Testament, Israel and the Church, and he argued that every Psalm should be prophetically interpreted.²² Even though the work of Gaebelein on the Psalter is very fascinating, yet it is obvious that his hermeneutical approach is questionable. He seems to be carried away with dispensationalism. His approach has led him to read too much meaning into the text on many occasions.²³ Also, his association of the Psalter with the Pentateuch demonstrates the degree to which he has read too much into the text of the scriptures. Even though he has made good observations through the exercise, yet it is unlikely that those who originally arranged the psalter had the Pentateuch in mind.²⁴

The importance of the psalter to African Christians is reflected in the devotional writings of selected three African Church leaders. The first person is J.O. Ositelu, the founder and first Primate of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) Worldwide. His book titled, *The Book of Prayer and the Uses of Psalms* was written for the "fortification of the children of God, to wrestle against all principalities and powers and also to uplift them (Christians)

spiritually.”²⁵ He gave prescriptions on how to use each of the Psalms in the Psalter.

The second person, J.A Bolarinwa, was a former registrar of Ibadan Anglican Diocese. His Primary aim in his book titled; *Potency and efficacy of Psalms*, was to “allow members of the public to appreciate the value of prayer through Psalms and to derive maximum benefits from their use.”²⁶ He contends that the most important thing needed while praying with the Psalms is faith for it is upon it that the success or failure of each Psalm lies.²⁷ He argues further that:

*The use of water or the adoption of certain postures for prayer has no extraordinary significance or any anti-Christian implication. Both are designed to prop up the faith of the individual and keep it on a high level essential for divine answer to our supplications.*²⁸

The work of Bolarinwa is unique in two areas: one, he created historical setting for each Psalm in the Psalter. Second, he prescribed how to read and use each of the Psalms in the Psalter.

The third person is Isaac Olayinka Olarewaju, a Pastor in the Christ Apostolic Church. His primary goal in the book titled *The Efficacious Power of Psalms in Daily Devotion* was to “explain the importance of each Psalm and the miracle that each Psalm can perform in our lives by the power of Jesus Christ in giving us victory, success, blessing and prosperity.”²⁹ He believes that Christians “should not leave the Psalms to the manipulation of occultists.”³⁰ He further argues that;

*There is authority in the word of God, especially God put a wonderful authority in the Psalms. If we use the Psalms with a strong belief in God, we will get an instant answer to our requests. We should all use the Psalms with a clean heart, and
God will surely answer our prayer.*³¹

III. The Hermeneutical Principles of the Psalter in the African Context

It is appropriate to consider some of the hermeneutical principles that might help African biblical scholars in their interpretation of the Psalter. The fact is often taken for granted that the primary aim of African biblical scholars is to present the message of the Psalter to the Africans in the perspective of their world view. In this way, the Psalter is made lively, relevant and capable of speaking to the situation of the people. The three principles discussed below are not exhaustive.

(a) Understanding the text:

It has been rightly observed that "the understanding of the text constitutes a solid foundation for Biblical Interpretation."³² Thus every African biblical scholar must bear the following points in mind as he relates to the general understanding of the text. One, the African biblical scholar should consult the original of the ancient manuscripts and carefully use their critical apparatus as well. Also, he must compare all other available texts such as the Greek, Syriac, Aramaic, Latin and Qumran with the Masoretic Text preferably the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. In doing the textual criticism of any Psalm it is advisable to choose the best manuscript (the Masoretic Text); the scholar should prefer the shorter reading as the longer reading may be as a result of addition, expansion or gloss; he should prefer the more difficult reading' and he should avoid conjectural reading wherever an alternative is possible. The scholar can then compare his findings from the ancient manuscripts with the Modern English Versions and even with the translations into African Languages. African biblical scholars should not be scared by the word 'criticism' as it does not always imply the negative implication it connotes in everyday speech. In biblical studies, the word criticism

is helpful as it makes a positive contribution to the understanding of the text. In fact, Abogunrin correctly notes that:

Genuine biblical criticism helps us to appreciate the works of the Bible writers better; it is neither intended to be destructive nor finding fault with the Bible but objectively researching to find out the truth and nothing but the truth. It is not us criticizing the Bible but the Bible criticizing us in our daily lives. The message comes back to us always. Genuine Bible criticism does not affect the uniqueness of the Bible.³³

Secondly, a good grasp of the original language, Hebrew, is indispensable for the understanding of the text. In fact, making use of the Masoretic Text and even other ancient manuscripts is useless without a good working knowledge of the language. The interpreter of the Psalter is able to do a thorough study of the key words in the psalms with a good knowledge of the Hebrew grammar and syntax. Also, he is able to use competently, the Hebrew Lexicon and Theological Wordbooks of the Old Testament.³⁴

Finally, apart from the knowledge of the Hebrew Language, the African biblical scholar must understand the nature and characteristics of the text he is working with - whether prose or poetry. In the case of the Psalter, the scholar must know the characteristics of Hebrew poetry such as parallelism, meter, etc. Each of which is common in the Psalter.

(b) Understanding the historical Context:

By the time the meaning of the text is settled, the historical context of the Psalm must be seriously considered by the African biblical Scholar as this will help him to ascertain what the text meant to its original readers and what it means to us today. C Hassel Bullock while commenting on the hermeneutical considerations for the Psalms says:

They (the Psalms) embody historical elements of the Israelite people, the result being that the true meaning of a Psalm cannot be fully grasped apart from those historical elements.³⁵

the Psalms says:

They (the Psalms) embody historical elements of the Israelite people, the result being that the true meaning of a Psalm cannot be fully grasped apart from those historical elements.³⁵

The understanding of the historical context of the Psalm helps the interpreter not only to appreciate the Psalmist's original context but also to interpret the Psalm correctly to African Christians who are fond of applying the message of the Psalter to their contemporary situation. Incidentally, several of the Psalms have superscription which are classified into three types namely historical, personal and liturgical which are helpful to our understanding of the historical context of the Psalm.³⁶ Unfortunately, some scholars regard these superscriptions as problematic. They argue that the superscriptions of the Psalms do not date to the time of their origin but to the time when they were collected.³⁷ They further argue that the activity of collecting and annotating the Psalms, which was probably done by the Levites, must have taken place during the fourth and third centuries B.C.E., that is in the last part of the Persian period and in the Ptolemaic period.³⁸ This argument may sound good but it is not tenable as it has been rightly noted that:

The superscriptions of the various Psalms are at least as old as the so-called Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek about 200 BC. They witness to respected Jewish tradition about authorship, liturgical and musical instructions.³⁹

The point is that the superscription of a Psalm where available, must be taken into consideration while interpreting such Psalm. It surely gives certain information on the historical context of the Psalm. The advice of Peter C. Craigie should guide us:

Although the historical value of the superscription of the Psalm

is of uncertain significance, it is wise to begin the consideration of a Psalm in the light of its superscription, where present.⁴⁰

(c) Understanding the Cultural Context:

The African biblical Scholar must understand his African World view and culture for a proper interpretation of the Psalter. S.O. Abogunrin notes correctly that:

Biblical scholars in Africa cannot come to the text in a personal vacuum, but rather with the awareness of the concerns stemming from their cultural background, contemporary situation and responsibility to the Church.⁴¹

The presence of evil in the World in general and in Africa in particular is not debatable. Every man is confronted daily with various problems which consequently have physical and psychological effects on him and his relation to others around him. Man's various fears include the fear of uncertainty, the fear of loosing one's job, the fear of sickness and death, etc. These various fears exhibited by man show his helplessness and limitation to which he seeks for a solution from the supreme being who has power and authority over the created world through the diviner, (Ifa Priest in Yoruba) who consults the oracle and gives his client certain incantations to relieve him of his threatening situation.⁴²

Unfortunately, African Christians are not immune to the problem of evil with its different dimensions in the society like the traditional worshippers. Therefore, one is not surprised that some Christians do consult the Ifa Priest for spiritual assistance in times of difficulty. Consequently, the African indigenous Churches have responded to this plight of their members who seek solutions to their problems from the Ifa Priests with the efficacious use of the scriptures. The fact that the indigenous Churches recognize the reality of evil in the society makes them to have a soft spot for

members who run around for help. Incidentally, most Christians in Africa believe strongly in the authenticity and authority of the Psalms when they are confronted with threats and fear of the unknown. Generally, African Christians identify themselves with the Psalmist in their various situations, hence they find the Psalter more relevant to their situation than any of the books of the Bible. Therefore, many African Christians use the Psalms not only for exhortation and meditation but also for prayer of victory over enemies, success in business, and blessing, and prosperity in the family. They believe strongly in the power and efficacy of psalms which they regard as the sword of the spirit to combat Satan and his hosts.⁴³ They use the Psalms for healing from various illnesses and deliverance from all sorts of evil that might be threatening them. The African's efficacious use of Psalms is summed up in this popular chorus:

*I challenge the jujumen, Once I lay hold of my Psalms,
Praying with psalm is a staff of Victory;
Praying with psalm is a great protection;
Praying with Psalm is a staff of provision;
Praying with Psalm is a virtue of healing;
Praying with Psalm is a staff of peace etc.⁴⁴*

Generally, the African's use of Psalms is similar to what obtains in the Roman Catholic Church as contained in *The Liturgy of the Hours According to Roman Rite*; and the Anglican Church as contained in *The Book of Common Prayer* where Psalms are read daily both in the morning and evening throughout the month and throughout the year. However, the African Church, particularly the indigenous Churches have gone a step further by prescribing how to use each of the Psalms in the Psalter to avert impending danger.

IV. An Examination of Psalm 3

(a) The Text

The Masoretic text (B H S) of Psalm 3 has nine verses because it starts the numbering of the verse from the superscription. However, the Greek (LXX) as well as English Versions have eight verses because the superscription is not counted as a verse.

Some of the key words in the Psalm include: (1) *Sar* and '*ayab*. The two words are used interchangeably to mean foe or enemy. The word '*ayab* is used for people who are hostile to God or man⁴⁵

(ii) *rasha*^o is an adjective for the wicked or criminal. The word is used of a person who is guilty of hostility against God or man and deserves punishment.⁴⁶

(iii) *Yeshu'a* has four different connotations: welfare or prosperity, deliverance, salvation by God from external evils as in vv.3&9; and victory.⁴⁷ (iv) *Sela* which basically means to lift up or exalt.⁴⁸ The word is used three times in the Psalm (vv 3, 5 and 9).

The word occurs about 71 times in the Psalter. It is used sometimes at the end of sections which may be equivalent to stanzas as in vv:3 and 5. Sometimes it occurs at the end of a Psalm as in verse:9. Generally, the word has connection with music, either in respect of the singing of the Psalm or with respect to its musical accompaniment. The LXX renders the Hebrew term *diapsalma* which might be taken to imply "pause" or "instrumental interlude."⁴⁹

(b) Historical Context

Psalm 3 is the first Psalm to have a superscription and is one of the fourteen Psalms that are directly linked with the historical events in the life of David.⁵⁰ The Psalm may have been composed by David, during or after his flight from Absalom. The Psalm is a summary of his experience as recorded in 2 Samuel 15-18.

(c) Cultural Context

There is a strong relationship between the world view of the Israelites and the Africans. The type of experience which David had with his enemies in Psalm 3 can be compared to what several African Christians pass through today as they feel betrayed by a friend or brother or even a son. The enemies of David were many and in spite of their various attacks, David recognized God as his shield (v.4), sustained (v.6) deliverer (vv.8,9), the one who lifted up his head (v.4); and the one who answered his prayer (v.5).

The awareness or consciousness enabled him to sleep and entertain no fear of the thousands of enemies around him (vv. 6-7). The Psalmist who recognized that his deliverance and blessing were from the Lord, also asked the same Lord to strike all his enemies and break their teeth (vv. 8-9).

The African Christians in the light of their historical background and cultural affiliation with the Israelites, use Psalms 3 in several ways such as healing backache and headache.⁵¹ Some Christians specifically read Psalm 3 while praying against enemies and slanderers.⁵² Some other Christians while seeking for protection at night, are fond of opening to Psalm 3, and placing it under their pillow while asleep.

Conclusion

This paper has brought to light certain undisputable facts:

1. It is obvious that the Western biblical scholars are deeply interested in the literary structure of the Psalms as demonstrated in the work of Hermann Gunkel and his followers. But then, while the understanding of the literary structure is good; the Western biblical scholars should be encouraged to appreciate the message of each Psalm in the Psalter as well.

2. The Psalter occupies a unique place among African Christians in their daily worship of God. The African Christians place much emphasis on the use of Psalms which they interpret literally to meet their various needs. Incidentally, the experiences of the Psalmist are very much similar to those of the African Christians. However, African Christians and biblical scholars should guard against extremity in their interpretation and use of the Psalter. Even though there are several similarities between the experiences of the Psalter and the African Christians, caution must be taken so as not to abuse the Psalter through false hermeneutics.
3. In the light of the concluding statements made in number one and two above, African biblical scholars in Bible Colleges, Seminaries, Universities and Colleges of Education should come together regularly to exchange ideas on relevant biblical issues, such as hermeneutics. They should organize seminars with the help of their Institutions to help African Christians in their understanding of the Psalter. Individual scholars should write book(s) on the message, use and theology of the Psalter for Churches in Africa. They should also write Hebrew textbooks to help biblical students in higher Institutions and Seminaries to master the language.

ENDNOTES

- 1 For a comprehensive list of such works, see B.S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. (Philadelphia: fortress Press. 1979). Pp. 504-8, 523-4.
2. See R.E. Clements, *One Hundred Years of Old testament Interpretation*. (Philadelphia: Westmihister Press, 1976), pp. 76-98 and W.L. Holladay *The Psalms through Three Thousand Years: Prayerbook of a Cloud of Witnesses*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), pp. 1-393.
3. J. Clinton McCann, "The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter." in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 59. (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993).
4. A.A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms: Volume I, Psalms 1-72*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmann Publ. Co., 1983). P. 23
5. Hons-Joachim Krans, *Psalms 1-59: A continental Commentary*. Translated by Hilton C. Oswald, (Minneapolis: Fortress press, 1993), p. 12.
6. Norman Snaith, *Hymns of The Temple*. (London: SCM Press, 1951), p. 13.
7. Hermann Gunkel, *The Psalms: A Form Critical Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967) . It was a translation of the volume 1 of the second edition of *Die Religion in Geschichte Und Gegenwart*, 1930. An example of the older devotion work on the Psalter is C.H. Spurgeon, *The treasury of David in three Volumes* (grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing house, 1966) ; while an example of an older critical work on the Psalter was carried out by B. Duhm. For a good summary of the work, see R.E Clement. *One Hundred Years of Old Testament interpretation*, pp. 77-8.

- 8 Gunkel, *The Psalms: A from Critical Introduction* , p. v.
- 9 Ibid., p. v.
10. Ibid., pp. 30-39
11. Ibid., pp. 1-4
12. Sigmund Mowinkel, *The psalms in Iserael's worship*
Translated by D.R Ap Thomas from the Norwegian Original
of 195/2 Volumes (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962).
13. See A.R Johnson, " The psalms" in *The old Testament and
Modern Study: A Generation of discovery and Research.*
Edited by H. h. Rowley (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1951), p.
190
- 14 Ibid.
15. It should be mentioned that some scholars disagreed with
Monwinckel on the point of cultic origin/setting for every
Psalm. One of such is Roland de Vonx, *Ancient Israel*
(Darton: Longman, & Todd, 1961), pp. 502-6 cf. Derek
Kidner, *Psalms 1-72 TOTC*, (Leicester England: Inter-varsity
Press, 1973, p. 13.
16. Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms.*
Translated by Keith R. Crim & Richard N. S Owen (Atlanta:
John Knox Press, 1971), pp. 1-301.
17. Ibid., pp. 31 and 34.
18. Ibid., pp. 36-51.
19. A.C. Gaebelein, *The Book of Psalms: A Devotional and
Prophetic Commentary.* (Wheaton Illinois: Our Hope Press,
1939), pp. 1-509.
20. Ibid., p. 9.
21. Ibid., p.9.
22. Ibid., pp. 187-9.

23. For instance, while speaking of Jesus' use of the Psalms, he says that "most likely in the nights spent in prayer, he poured out his heart in the language of the Psalms." Ibid., p. 10. Again speaking on Psalm 41, he says the Psalm has a beautiful prophetic picture of our Lord's visible and glorious return. Ibid., 188.
24. It should be mentioned that Gaebelein has followers. One of them is J. Vernon McGee, *Through the Bible* Volume II (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1981)
25. J.O. Ositelu, *The Book of prayer and the Uses of Psalms* (Ogere, Sagamu: Publications Department of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) Worldwide, n.d.), p. 2.
26. J.A. Bolarinwa, *Potency and Efficacy of Psalms* U (Ibadan: Olusayi Press, n.d.), p.3.
27. Ibid., p. 3.
28. Ibid., p. 4.
29. Isaac Olayinka Olarewaju, *The Efficacious Power of Psalms in Daily Devotion*. Suleya: Awosanmi Press, 1998), p. iii.
30. Ibid., p.i.
31. Ibid., p.ii.

32. S.O. Agobunrin, "Biblical Research in Africa: The Task Ahead" *African Journal of Biblical Studies*. Vol. I No. 1 (April, 1986): 18.
33. Ibid., p. 11. For detailed information on the aims of O.T. textual criticism, see Bruce K. Walke, "Aims of O.T. Textual Criticism" *Westminster Theological Journal* Vol. 51/1 (Spring 1989): 93-108.

34. Unfortunately, the issue of Hebrew Language has been a problem as several African Scholars are poor in biblical languages, especially Hebrew. However, we hope to get over the problem soon as some of the African biblical scholars are determined to master the language and teach it to others. An example of such scholars is J.O. Akao, of the Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan whose recently published book titled *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1999) aims at initiating the students into the field of Old Testament Hebrew Studies.
35. C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament poetic Books: The Wisdom and Songs of Israel* (Chicago: Moody press 1979), pp. 126-7.
36. For more information on the three classification of the Psalms superscriptions, see S.E. Gillingham, *The poems and Psalms of the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1994), pp. 245, 250.
37. Clause Westermann, *The Psalms: Structure, Context & Message* (Translated by Ralph D. Gehrke (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1980), p. 19.
38. William L. Holladay, *The Psalms through Three Thousand Years: Prayerbook of a Cloud of Witnesses*. (Minneapolis: Fortress press, 1993), p. 75
39. R.E. Murphy, *Wisdom Literature and Psalms*. (Nashville: Abingdon press, 1988), pp. 110-11.
40. Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, (WBC Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1983), p. 72.
41. Abogunrin, "Biblical Research in Africa: The Task Ahead", p.14.

42. For various reasons why Africans visit the Ifa Priest, see P.J. Arowele, "This Generation Seeks Signs: The Miracles of Jesus with Reference to the African Situation," *Africa Theological Journal* Vol. 10, No. 3 (1981), p. 27; J.O. Awolalu, "Sacrifice in the Religion of the Yoruba" A Ph. D. Thesis, University of Ibadan, 1971, p. 159; Dada Adelowo, "Divination as an Aspect of Healing process in the Major Religions in Nigeria" *Africa Theological Journal* Vol. 16, No. 1 (1987): pp. 86-88, and Julius Muthengi, "The Art of Divination" *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* Vol. 12, No. 2 (1993), pp. 95-100.
43. Isaac Olayinka Olarewaju, *The Efficacious power of Psalms in Daily Devotion*. (Ibadan: Feed the Hungry Samaritan Ministry, 1998), p. 11.
44. J.O. Ositelu, *The Book of Prayer and the Uses of Psalms*. (Ogere, Shagamu: Publication Department of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) Worldwide, n.d.), p. 5
45. Francis Brown S.R. Driver and C.A. Briggs *The New Brown Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon With An Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Peabody Massachussets: Hendrickson publishers, 1979), p.39.
46. Ibid., p. 957.
47. Ibid., p. 447.
48. Ibid., pp. 666-700.
49. Craigie, Psalms 1-50, p. 76.
50. Other historical Psalms are: 7, 18, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, and 142. See R.K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans publ. Co., 1969), p. 978.
51. Ositelu, *The Book of prayer and the Uses of Psalms*, p. 3 and

- Bolarinwa, *potency and Efficacy of Psalms*, p. 9.
52. Olarewaju, *The Efficacious power of Psalms in Daily Devotion*, p.1.