A FORGOTTEN PASSAGE FROM A FORGOTTEN ERA (1 CHR. XVI 8-36)

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Many Old Testament passages demand attention. Others invite scholarly neglect. 1 Chr. xvi 8-36 lies buried in the second category. Commentaries refer to the relevant Psalm commentaries. Monographs ignore it. The passage deserves a better fate, for, as the present article will seek to demonstrate, it serves a vital function in the books of Chronicles.

Most discussion of the passage is limited to explaining the forty-five textual differences between Chronicles and Pss. cv 1-15, xcvi 1b-13a, and cvi 1, 47 f., on which it depends 1). The great majority of these may be explained as orthographical variants, minor grammatical changes, textual corruption, or insignificant variations. Two appear to represent conscious attempts to avoid anachronisms, viz., vs. 27 replaces “in his sanctuary” (Ps. xcvi 6) with “in his place,” and vs. 29 substitutes “before him” for “to his courts” (Ps. xcvi 8). Werner Lemke 2) has rightly called for caution in referring to conscious changes, but in neither of these cases does LXX present evidence of a different Vorlage.

A few textual differences may have theological importance. The substitution in vs. 13 of Israel for Abraham (Ps. cv 6) not only brings better parallelism, but also identifies the readers as the true Israel 3).

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1) The recent attempts by Peter R. Ackroyd, I & II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah (London, 1973), pp. 64 f., and Hartmut Gese, “Die Entstehung der Buchereinteilung des Psalters,” in Wort, Lied und Gottespruch, Festschrift für Joseph Ziegler (1972), 2, pp. 61 f., to deny dependence upon the canonical Psalms must be rejected in light of the practice of the Chronicler of relying so heavily upon other literary sources and in light of the explanations for the use of the sources given in the following article.

2) “The Synoptic Problem in the Chronicler’s History,” HTbR 58 (1965), pp. 349-63. That there was some difference between the Chronicler’s Vorlage and the Massoretic text may be inferred from the agreement between Fragment E of 11QPs of Ps. xcvi 3 and the Septuagint. That such differences were extensive is doubtful for these particular verses. See now the sparse use of these verses by Leslie C. Allen, The Greek Chronicles, Supp. VT 25 and 27 (1974).

3) Wilhelm Rudolph, Chronikbücher (Tübingen, 1955), p. 120.
The versions evidence some textual assimilation, but certainly give no warrant for emending the text of Chronicles, as does RSV, nor for seeking a different Vorlage for Chronicles. A quite minor change occurs in both vs. 30 and vs. 33, where mippānāy w becomes millepānāy w. The writer or his tradition may have shied away from speaking of activity in the face of God, choosing to make clear the prepositional function of the phrase. The transposition of xcvi 1oa from 30b to 31b may result from copyists’ errors (Rudolph, p. 124) or may reflect a desire to place the divine kingship motif at the conclusion rather than at the introduction of the strophe. The omission of the calls for God’s specific judgement upon the nations in 31b and 33 may again result from textual corruption (Rudolph) or may reflect political reality in which such explicit language condemning enemy rulers could not be tolerated. The desired effect is retained by employing verses 8, 14, 23 ff., 28, 30a, 31, 33, and by adding yitšenu to the divine epithet and wheqšilen to the cry for help in vs. 35. The suggestion of Leslie C. Allen that MT in Chronicles represents a conflated text may be the preferred solution here (Part I, p. 217).

The often-studied textual problems show little that is of real theological significance. The significant question is why the writer chose portions of three psalms which had no claim to belong to the Davidic tradition and which required removal of anachronisms to accommodate them to the context. Did its contents somehow fit his purpose better than that of other Psalms available to him? The present article seeks to answer this last question affirmatively.

The first task is to examine the passage to determine its distinctive theological contributions. These must then be compared to the remainder of the Chronicler’s history to establish its place within the redaction history of Chronicles.

1 Chr. xvi 8-34 has combined portions of a kingship of Yahweh Psalm, a historical hymn, and a historical liturgy into a well-rounded communal thanksgiving. To this is appended in vss. 35 ff. the congregational response from Ps. cvi, consisting of a plea for deliverance and a doxology. It is this unique combination of thanksgiving and plea for deliverance which the writer sees as appropriate for the foundation liturgy of the Jerusalem cult.

The combination of psalms has transformed the content as well. Following the traditional hymnic introduction, Ps. cv narrates the history of Israel: covenant and protection of the patriarchs, Joseph in Egypt, plagues, exodus, guidance in the wilderness, possession of