

scholarship, always changing, LeGrand Baker

One thing that needs to be said at the beginning. This study does not represent the thinking of “current scholarship.” “Current scholarship” means the theories accepted by the most prominent scholars in any given field at any given time. Let me give you an example. When I was a boy, I was taught that the Constitution was divinely inspired and that the men behind it (Washington, Jefferson, the Adams, and others) were great, good, selfless men. That was not an idea unique to my Mormon rural-Utah upbringing. It was taught as a truth by American historians from before the time of the Prophet Joseph until after the First World War. And the principle was supported by then “current scholarship.” Then a scholar noticed that these great, good men were also, for the most part, comparatively wealthy, and that they were not only interested in political principle, but in economic principle also. And that many of them used the economic advantage of the separation from England to improve their own – and their associates – financial situation. That “current scholarship” soon evolved to the point that when I went to graduate school (I got both a masters and a Ph.D. in American history – the period of the American Revolution and the writing of the Constitution. That was also the time of the revolution of the 1960s and 70s.), it was the most popular “current scholarship” that Washington and the revolutionaries were motivated only by avarice and the desire to augment their own personal wealth – and that consequently there was nothing either divine or especially good about either their political principles or the Constitution they created. That idea was not universally accepted, by American historians, but it was the most popular “current” scholarly approach. Now, I am glad to say, some very competent scholars have produced biographies of George Washington and John Adams to show that these were driven by a love of political principle rather than a desire for personal gain – so we have gone full circle, and it is once again the “current” thinking of the most prominent scholars that the Founding Fathers were good and just men whose public personal and public lives were driven by their devotion to the principles of freedom, and not by the love of money.

The study of the Psalms has gone through much the same cycle, but has not yet gone full circle.

Gunkel
Mowinckel
Canaanite religion
minimalists

My work is based largely on the thinking of the scholars of the first half of the 20th century, Gunkel, Mowinckel, Johnson and others. There are still many scholars who believe as they did, but they are dismissed as the old fashioned by those scholars who ride the crest of the newest theories. I have gone back to the men who actually believed there was an Old Testament New Year’s festival and that the Psalms were the text of the temple ceremonies of that festival. Therefore what I am writing is neither dependant upon, nor consistent with the thinking of the scholars who establish the present meaning of “current scholarship.”